

Lighten Our Darkness

A Novel

by

Robert Keable

"They shall draw their swords against
the beauty of thy wisdom."

The book of the prophet Ezzkiel.

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"Here we are also at the root of the truth, which as such goes back to Plato, with which all Christian mystics are familiar, . . . the truth that divine love lives within every one and that it depends upon externals whether it manifests itself or not. These externals may be inclination to a woman, the influence of appropriate surroundings, or a hard fate, which cause the soul to change—the problem is always that the instrument, 'man,' shall be attuned in such a way that God may play upon it.

"Those who demand new forms of belief most noisily, are, as far as I can judge, intrinsically a-religious. When they have become more mature, even they will recognise that they are not concerned for a new faith, but for a new formation of being; that such a struggle does not necessarily mean religious strife, and that they will find themselves much more rapidly if they make up their minds to try to express their being in the world of appearance without any side-glances upon God.

"The rare man who succeeds in anchoring his consciousness in true Being, knows himself to be immortal, and death no longer signifies an end to him.

"No one can hope consciously to survive death unless he is conscious of his immortality, unless, in fact, he has lit the divine spark within him."

COUNT KEYSERLING.

The Travel Diary of a Philosopher.

"It is the Light of lights and is said to be beyond darkness. It is knowledge, the One to be known, and the Goal of knowledge, dwelling in the hearts of all."

Srimad-Bhagavad-Gita.

Lighten Our Darkness

CHAPTER I

Dick's Dismissal

I

To Dick, as the silence grew and deepened, the call of the sunlit world outside became all but irresistible. He longed unspeakably to be out there, and free, with all this past. It was now positively a physical strain to remain seated upon his bentwood chair. Yet he must not only be seated, he told himself: he must be immovable. The absurd conviction became a kind of dreadful obsession as the seconds passed. If he shuffled, that would be to emphasise the stupid feeling he had already—as though he were a school-boy before a master; if he changed position or spoke again, it would be a kind of blasphemy under the circumstances—as though one were to break silence at the moment of the Transubstantiation of the Host in the Mass. Yet the strain of this interview had become intolerable.

He must not even lift his eyes. When he had finished speaking—it seemed hours ago—his gaze had fallen naturally enough from the Bishop's face to a pair of old riding-boots stowed away under some book-shelves, commonplace objects which he had first contemplated as a relief, half-consciously and in all innocence, but which had now taken on a kind of dreadful hostility, as had the rest of the room. They seemed to insist, grimly, that Dick was a stranger already. He would never ride by their master's side on the long treks again, when, as the shadows fell, they two would laugh and joke at the

thought of camp ahead, and their supper. Nor would he read again the books above them, stretched at his ease in the Bishop's easy-chair, the while the old man, in his faded purple skull-cap, wrote leisurely at the desk before him. Ride? Read? He would probably never enter the familiar room again.

That was why, as he sat there with his back to the open door and the only window, the sounds and scents of the country outside made so imperative an appeal. He could even see, mentally, the wonder of the view from the Bishop's door. First there was the little patch of overgrown garden, where self-sown zinnias and phlox and petunias rioted; then the rough cart-track of a road, with its very ruts and stones and dust familiar and dear; then the high fragrant gums, blue below with young shoots, iron and olive-grey above against the deep colour of the sky, with the unwieldy herons' nests atop, where the great birds rode the wind and cried hoarsely as they landed on their precious bundles of twigs and excrement; then, seen through the straight slim trunks, the wide plain that stretched to the distant Range whose every crest and valley was scored in his mind and seemed to him home. The narrow trails ran away and away down there in the vivid sunshine. Banks of stark aloes could be faintly seen by the eye, but Dick, staring at the Bishop's old boots, could picture vividly the lovely yellow hands they held out, palms uppermost, to the benediction of the light. And that the lands were green and gold, now, with the maize and wheat and Kaffir-corn, mattered little, for he loved them just as well when they were sere and naked and iron in the glistening heat. Oh the dear, dear land! It called to him. It was friendly and kind. It would never thrust him out. Nor did he yet wholly realise, as he sat there, that he was to cease to see it by his own action in so short a time. Indeed, since it and

its people were in his heart for ever, he could never feel that he had lost it as he felt already that he had lost all else.

But he scarcely thought of such things now, feeling only this intolerable strain, this horrible climax, that would not pass. He had schooled himself for a kind of death, but not for this "unconscionable time a-dying." If only this old man would speak, it mattered little what he said. He could bear anything now, if only the Bishop would say it and let him go.

He little guessed, however, what would be said. For at last the Bishop spoke wholly unexpectedly. He cleared his throat once or twice, unsuccessfully. And then, tenderly, he all but whispered: "Ah, Dick, Dick, and our dear Lord has loved you so!"

At the words, a score of conflicting emotions swept through Richard Thurstan as a tornado sweeps. They whirled round and round, and choked his speech, and clutched at his throat, and blinded his eyes, and all but dragged him under into the great deep. He looked at the old man, and then hastily away, for he could not bear to look. The kind eyes, the scanty grey hair, the familiar lined face—the trouble and the pain were too visible. His gaze dropped to the stained deal table and the spread papers and the interrupted letter; to the breviary, in its shabby binding and odds and ends of markers, with which he was as nearly at home as its owner; to the signed portrait of the Holy Father; and to the ancient bone crucifix, picked up in Brittany, that had been his own poor gift. And then a kind of anger mastered all else and freed his tongue.

"Then why has He given me no sign," he burst out, "no answer at all to my prayers? Tell me that, Mon-signor! And these last eight days, especially—I have left no stone unturned. I tell you I have thought and

thought till I can think no longer. I have been over it all again from A to Z, every argument, every consideration. Besides, it's no new thing, my lord. You know that. For ten years I've held on, God knows, and I can no longer."

The old man betrayed no vestige of impatience or annoyance. He was almost apologetic. Indeed he said as much. "Yes. I am sure. But, Dick, don't you think, sometimes, that that is just what He wants? Of course you have to answer for your own soul. No man can help you—much. But suppose our Saviour just wanted to—to *bold you*. You've held on, you say. Don't you think, perhaps, He wanted you to let go and rest on His own arm? And—and has He not been answering you all these ten years?"

An intolerable weariness grew upon Dick as the other spoke. "You mean," he began, "you mean——" And suddenly he could not go on. It wasn't worth saying, now. He was too tired. Besides, he had been through all that argument so many times before.

But the Bishop would not let him escape it. "Wasn't it but two months ago," the kindly voice insisted, "that I confirmed two hundred and more at your Mission? I shall never forget the fervour of those simple people. Nor did I tell you, my son, but that following Sunday's Mass was one of the most moving services I have ever been at. It seemed to me, as it did, I am sure, to all there, that our Lord came almost visibly to the altar when their pastor bent his head over the sacred Host. And in ten years, Dick, how many stories have you not told me of rude rough souls illumined with grace, of visitations of our Lord and His Holy Mother, that are boons given—(the old man's voice faltered a little)—given to few of us, my son. No, no. It seems to me that He has been answering you all the time."

Dick sighed, and moved restlessly. It was so useless to reply. Was he to argue the point all over again? Fragments of speech, names, books, memories, lay ready, but a tumbled lifeless mass, in his mind. The phrase, "Varieties of religious experience," flashed there a moment, and was instantly rejected. Back of all that jumble of science and philosophy, a kind of flickering cinematograph meant more to him at the moment: the dark interiors of native huts—Maria Makumane's dying—Augustine Thabo asking for higher wages—Angela Lilitoane in the door of his patrol tent with her fourth bastard child—the village of Pokane in the dawn as the chief accused the catechist of adultery—rain on the mountains—books, books, more books—long hours in the saddle with the consciousness of unworthiness and doubt storming at his heart—Bergson—Jung—Leuba—God! He was back at them again! But there, he must say something. He gathered all his resolution and looked the Bishop in the face.

"I know, my lord. But I have considered all that, I fear."

"Then this is your last word? You mean to leave your Mission next week?"

"I do, my lord. I can't help it."

"And your Orders, for ever?"

"Yes."

"You know what must inevitably follow?"

"I do."

"Excommunication?" (But the tired kind eyes did not falter.)

At that something awoke in Dick. What use was all this inquisition? He spoke almost rudely, to end it summarily. "My lord, I can no longer honestly and sincerely stand at the altar or sit in the confessional because I cannot continue to profess that the Catholic

Church is the infallible Body of Christ. I have told you so already : there it is in a word again. At the moment I can see no more and no less than that. I cannot, yet, even attempt to sift what may remain—if anything. God—Our Lord—I don't know. (His mind faltered again a little, and he caught hastily at reality.) It's the Church that has gone. I can't repeat the Creed. There is only one thing I can do. Resign."

• The Bishop leant forward and clasped his hands on the desk before him. He was wholly moved. "Ah, Dick, Dick," he cried, "be patient ! Our Blessed Lord has been so patient with you. Do not betray Him thus easily. Come here, or go to the Dominicans in the Transvaal—or the Marists in Natal, or, if you like, take a long lonely holiday ; but do not do this. Listen to an old man, my son, an old man who has seen light and shade, impatience and its bitter fruit. Will you orphan yourself of Almighty God your Father and the Holy Church your Mother, at a word ? For that is what it will be, and what then, my son, what then ? Dick, by the tenderness of Our Saviour, I, your bishop, your father, your friend, entreat you. There are few, if any, to whom I would speak so, my son, my dear son."

Dick groped for his hat. He found himself on his feet. He knew, now, that if he sat still a moment longer, emotion would betray him again as it had betrayed him so often in the past. He would be telling himself that the Bishop was so much older and wiser than he, and that a host of Bishops, as it were—theologians, Catholic men of science, Catholic thinkers and writers, all older and wiser than he—stood behind the Bishop. Nor would he be able to bear to watch the piercing of that kind heart, slowly, inexorably, with the spear of his own resolution. And he would falter a moment, allow his emotion to be turned to the white arms on the Cross, to the blue mantle

of the Mother, and betray his honest doubt. Indeed, it was more than that, more than mere doubt. He was past doubt. So far as he could do it, holding himself in hand, brain alert, mind keen, heart prepared, he had finally faced what seemed to him the truth and made his own decision. He had spoken that decision. The authority of the Catholic Church had become to him no more than the authority of a group of men. It did not matter how old or how wise a group. He was too good a Catholic, even in his un-faith, not to see that. There had been only one possible course open to him. He must resign, and he must go now before he weakened.

But he allowed himself, hat in hand, at the door, one outburst of relief. He gripped the rough wood of the side-piece without knowing it, and faced about. "Monsignor, I must go. I cannot bear it if I stay here with you longer. Can't you see that? This is like death to me; it *is* death, in a way. It's the end of a life, anyway. And I love it all so. It would be heaven—heaven—to kneel again at your feet and confess to you and banish thought. But that's—that's—that's *cowardice*. It is really. Just because I hate to hurt you. Because my heart loves it all so. Because I love my people. Even the rotters. But I *have* thought it out to the end, at last. During this retreat. It's been a real retreat. Only, this time—well, I've crucified my mind a hundred times, but yesterday I crucified my heart."

"Is it better," asked the old man mildly, "if there is to be crucifixion, to slay one's faith than one's reason?"

Something in the other's tone braced Dick to adhere to his decision. He caught at it. The Bishop had epitomised the vital difference between them. He knew that. At the cross-roads, in the final crisis, the Church demanded—if it must be—the triumph of faith. And

Dick knew himself to be of those—rightly or wrongly, wisely or foolishly—who must make the other choice.

"That's just it," he said, straightening himself, and speaking much more firmly. "It's really very clear, isn't it? Bishop, you have been a real father to me, and I am more than grateful. Everyone has been kind. And you know how I love you all, and my Mission. You *know* it. That makes it much easier for us all. You know that I leave because to me it would be betrayal to stay, and I know that you will—will—he could hardly bring himself to say it, but he did)—excommunicate me in the end, because it would be betrayal if you did not. Till then, Monsignor, I ask of you your prayers."

In answer the Bishop rose and came forward to the door, a frail figure though still erect and resolute. His action took Dick by surprise. His hand dropped and he stood waiting.

The Bishop reached him and put both his hands on his shoulders, looking into his eyes. Dick returned the other's gaze without flinching. Thus, for a few seconds, the two stood in silence, but not a silence as the last. This was eloquent. In it a kind of peace stole into Dick's heart, and a clarity, as when one emerges from a thick wood into the wide air-free spaciousness of a mountain-side. It seemed to him that although he had reached a barren and forbidding waste, at least it stretched to the far horizon. He could see, if it were but to the rim of the world.

The elder dropped his hands at last. "Let us have it clear, Dick," he said. His tone was matter of fact and calm. "You return to-morrow, Saturday, and conduct the services of the Sunday. You leave Monday morning, and as you go you mail me your official information, upon which I shall act, immediately in the case of the appoint-

ment of your successor, with the charitable long-suffering of the Church in regard to yourself. Is that so?"

"I shall leave Sunday night," said Dick, "after Benediction."

"Very well. Sunday night, then. On the Sunday you will do all you have to do with the full intention of the Catholic Church?"

The courtesy and the sympathy of that went to the young man's heart. "Yes, Monsignor," he blurted out. "If you can understand, I—the real I—seem hardly to have changed at all yet. It is only I know I must get out."

"I understand, my son. Only too well, Dick. But my explanation of your frame of mind would only reopen all this sad business. And I see that that is useless now."

"You do see that?" demanded Dick eagerly. He could not help that much.

The Bishop nodded, sadly. "Yes, I see it. You have to work out your own salvation, my boy. You have set your feet on a road that you must follow. I am more sorry than I can say, and you know I cannot think otherwise than that it is the road to destruction. But you have set your feet. You must go seeking if you are to find. You have gone beyond me, Dick; I see that. Only never, *in life*, can you go beyond the grace of Almighty God." He paused. Then he repeated solemnly: "*In life*, Dick, in life. . . . That is all the sermon you will get from me. Words are useless, for you know all that I know." His tone changed. "Now kneel down," he concluded.

Dick hesitated in surprise. The impetuosity of youth had not expected so great charity in the wisdom of old age. The other saw his hesitation. A rather sad little smile crept into the old man's face. "Yes, kneel down. It is not yet Monday. I am still your father-in-God, my son."

At that Richard Thurstan knelt and bent his head, closing his eyes. He felt the other's hands rest on his head and heard, after a little pause, the whisper of the Bishop's voice. As the words reached his understanding, the tears stung his eyes. With tenderness, with wistful undefeated faith, the old man was dismissing him as if he refused to see other than the moment, other than his son in the Lord.

"*Et nunc commendo te Deo, et verbo gratiæ ipsius, qui potens est ædificare, et dare hereditatem in sanctificationis omnibus,*" the Bishop murmured, his hands resting firmly on the bowed head before him. Then Dick felt one lift, and automatically he, too, signed himself. "*Benedicat te omnipotens Deus, Pater, et Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus. Amen.*"

"Amen," said Richard Thurstan, and was dismissed to his quest.

II

But he did not think of it at all as a quest as he walked away down the rutty road. He had not begun to view it in that wise. For the moment, the feeling that was steadily and swiftly growing upon him with every stride was unexpectedly one of relief. That was not unnatural, however. As he had reminded the Bishop, for ten years now he had been a priest in the Catholic Church, the Church into which he had been baptised as a baby by his Catholic parents, the Church in whose outward allegiance he had never yet faltered, whatever the conflict of his thoughts. But equally for those ten years there had been conflict, the insistent, insidious, ever-growing doubt that the authority of the Church was not of a nature to cover the stupendous assumptions that he had daily to make.

That conflict had really only begun at his ordination. As a boy at home and at a Catholic school he had never

questioned the truth of Catholicism. At Oxford, he had scarcely weighed the question, for it seemed to him that the very forms of Protestantism about him confirmed all that he had been taught. You could scarcely expect a Catholic to feel other than assured when he placed the Faith of Christendom against the religion of his college chapel, or the studied magnificence of Cowley, or the tumultuous Evangelicalism of the Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian Union. He had looked in on them all. The Dean's reading of Matins had simply not seemed, to the young Catholic, religion at all, but rather a kind of academic ceremony that had indeed become meaningless, but which was a pleasant part of the Oxford tradition. "Sung Mass" at Cowley left him merely perplexed, first at the strangeness of such an attempt to establish what was Catholic outside the Church, and secondly at the extraordinary spiritual contrast that existed to him between it and Catholic Mass as he knew it at home. And as for "Billy" Sunday, on a Mission from America—well, what *was* there to say? Father Dreenan, his confessor, had been charitable. "Try to see, Thurstan," he had said, "that that man *really* loves Our Lord. But in his own way. Not in Our Lord's."

Dick had hesitated, on the brink of ordination, as one naturally hesitates, but his mother's love and his father's faith, as much as anything, had carried him through. In his seminary, doubt had only been allowed to thrust its head forward in order that it might be decorously and piously decapitated. Dick had been quite obedient. A heretic or a heathen philosopher would be gravely introduced to the circle of students, and at the word of command they would slay him. Dick had not perceived that the condemned stood no chance at all.

Yet it was the ghosts of these slain who had finally stood in his path. Once ordained, once out in the world,

once called upon to forgive sins, to offer the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, to teach the giant dogmas of the Church, the old question: "By what Authority doest thou these things?" had begun to ring in his ears. And he had found that he could not make an answer that honestly satisfied his mind. Increasingly he had found it so. He had fought the enemy in the set battles of retreats and conferences, in skirmishes in his study, in the constant guerilla warfare of his work. Honestly he had fought, spurred thereto by his sincere love of his people, by the thought of his parents, by the kindness of his Bishop, by the cry of his own heart. And had been beaten—and had refused to acknowledge defeat. Had refused to acknowledge it, indeed, until the bitter fact had confronted him that he was in danger of dishonesty in his own soul.

Once conscious of that, the battle for the Church was lost. The last stand, as it were, had been the retreat just ended, a retreat conducted by the Bishop himself. Day by day, the young priest had meditated, communicated, prayed and praised; and day by day, in the silences that followed, as he sat at meat, as he walked the monastery grounds, as he lay down to sleep, his enemy had confronted him. A victorious enemy. 'You no longer see,' it had told him, 'anything supernatural in the Unity of the Church. You have read too much of Psychology to ascribe anything unique to her Holiness. Her Catholicism is a vaunted thing that is not true: she has, in reality, conquered only the Latin mind. Her Apostolicity is far less remarkable than the succession of the Dalai Lamas. But all such things amount to little by this: you know her Christology is as anthropomorphic as the tale of Krishna. You KNOW it. Now then! No; it is neither here nor there that you might perhaps become a Modernist in secret and sacrifice your mind

for your people. The heart may have reasons that the mind knows not of, but *your* mind cannot be ruled by *your* heart. By that argument a born Buddhist might rightly remain outwardly a Buddhist. Or a Protestant a Protestant. Or a heathen Bantu a heathen Bantu. And in that case, what are *you* doing in South Africa? In *any* case, what are you doing here? No! YOU MUST GO. Or be dishonest if you like. Only, in that case—well, please burn your books and don't worry *me* any more. . . .

And Dick had gone to the Bishop.

Thus it was, then, that no thought of any new seeking after wisdom, nor any idea of himself as a martyr for truth, entered Dick Thurstan's mind as he walked away from the Bishop's little house on a corner of the monastic estate. He merely felt himself a beaten man, but in his defeat, in the act of submission to reason, the emotional strain had been the main thing. He had come to dread the announcement of his resolution to his Bishop (seeing that it was also the final announcement, as it were, to himself as well) far more than anything else. That step over the Rubicon—the turning of his back, as it seemed, upon a lifetime—had been almost more than he could undertake. It had been far more overwhelming than his ordination, for example. To that he had gone supported by his parents and friends, his teachers and his fellow-students, the prayers of the faithful and the whole company of Heaven; to this he had had to go alone. He had been a week in Gethsemane, and he had just come from a Calvary. He was amazed to find, then, that, for the moment, there was growing almost an Easter joy in his secret heart.

III

Three hundred yards or so along the road, a couple of

lay brethren, under the directions of Father Thomas, were busily engaged in repairing the wall of the monastery reservoir that recent floods had damaged. They were working in their shirt-sleeves, with high-braced flannel trousers and coarse workmen's boots, their hair roughly cut short, the beads of perspiration standing on their brows. Above them towered high rocky krantzes, with bushes and even trees springing from every cleft and choking miniature kloofs. From one such issued a clear stream of water which was swallowed at once by a small aqueduct of concrete and irón. This led to the main reservoir, built up in a natural hollow, of stone quarried from the mountain side itself. All this was on the left of the road as it ran from the Bishop's house to that of the religious, and on the right the hill fell again until it reached the plain.

Father Thomas straightened himself, pushing the old clerical hat, green with age and reserved for such tasks, back on his head. His freckled good-humoured countenance lit up with a smile. "Said good-bye, Father?" he queried. "When are you going?"

For a moment Dick started. Did the world know then? But it did not take him a second to realise that the other merely knew that he, with the priests from other missions, would be leaving for their stations to-day or to-morrow, and had supposed him to have been having but a final chat with their always accessible and sympathetic Bishop.

"Yes," he said. "But I don't leave till to-morrow. Father Lauriston is at Penluma for confessions to-day and Saturday, and it will be time enough if I get in to-morrow evening."

"Good! Then you've a holiday to-day. Lend a hand this afternoon in the Two Kopje land. We're reaping the Kaffir corn, down there."

"I'd like to. When do you start?"

"They're on it now. Can't you see?"

He pointed with his finger into the plain away to the right, where two kopjes rose from its dead level, and Dick could indeed, after a while, distinguish moving specks among the waving rich brown sea that flooded about their base. "Yes. I see," he said. "I suppose they began at dawn. Who's in charge?"

"Clementi. He's good for a native. But I don't think all our people have turned out or there'd be more cleared. I'm riding down this afternoon, anyway."

"You can find me a horse?"

"Sure. But you've no breeches?"

Dick laughed. "That doesn't matter. I can ride in these." And he half lifted his black cassock to show the old trousers beneath. "They're beautifully patched, but the patch is in the right place to improve them for riding!"

Father Thomas glanced at the sun. "Well," he said, "we've an hour yet before Office. To the work, my lads."

"That's the way to get rid of your fat, Brother Martin,"

Dick called good-humouredly to the lay-brother whose rotundity was one of the jokes of the good fathers and who was about to heave a big rock into place with an expression of titanic energy on his face.

The brother glanced over his shoulder. "But it's no good at all, Father," he cried. "The fat won't go. I might as well only have to sweep the choir, like Brother Francis."

"There was wax enough dropped last week to give him a job of work to-day, anyhow," retorted Dick. "Why don't you mend your broken windows, too?"

"Ask Father Superior; he grudges the pennies."

"Come on, Brother," struck in Father Thomas.

"Maybe we'll find him some when we sell our corn."

"It's a good price this year," said Dick, walking on. "Cheerio, and be good boys."

"The same to you, Father," laughed the fat brother, stooping again to his task.

Dick even whistled as he walked. What good fellows they were, he thought! Once again there rose in his mind an old question: if, in the religious life, he might not have found a settlement of his difficulties. As a secular priest, he had had more time of his own to read and think. As a monk, every hour would have been filled, and that as his superiors ordered. But even as he turned on his right into the path that ran through the monastery graveyard, he realised again that it would not have been so. He would not have been given the work of a lay-brother or the farm stewardship of Father Thomas. They would not even have set him to superintend the cemetery as they had Father Augustine. He would, he knew, have been employed in the Library or sent to preach missions. And even if they had—well, when he rode for weeks on end among the mountains, roughing it, all but without books, had he there found intellectual rest?

He slowed down his pace and checked his thoughts, allowing the beauty of the place to calm his mind. For Father Augustine knew his job. Oleander bloomed here in thickets, with its evergreen lanceolate leaves and red and white blossoms. Up a dead blue-gum, bougainvillea climbed, the brick-red variety, a pillar of loveliness. Where a tiny stream crossed the road and ran trickling into lush grass, arum lilies flowered in profusion and asparagus fern trailed at random on some fallen rocks. Among the simple graves, tall cypresses stood, and as he paused and turned by the great cemetery cross, it was as if he were in Lombardy. One could see through the straight dark green pillars that rose as sentinels against

the sky, to where, below, the monastery garden fell in terraces. Upon one a pool had been constructed, from which a jet of water shot up in the sunlight. The cooing of doves in the high trees fell on his ear. Far below again, a plantation of sturdy young oak-trees spread out towards a rift in the further hills. And away and away on the horizon the great Range buttressed the wide vault of blue and caught some fleecy clouds on its riven pinnacles.

"Hi! Mind my lobelia!" cried a querulous voice behind him.

He started. There was old Augustine, his cassock belted high, his scapula awry, his eyes, beneath pent-houses of shaggy eyelids, glowering at the offender. "At your feet, man, at your feet. Can't you see where you're walking?"

Dick stepped back hastily from a big dock leaf filled with tiny plants of the little blue flower, on some of whose frail shoots the blossoms were already forming.

"I didn't see them," he apologised. "I'm sorry, Father. But I've only crushed one or two."

Augustine came forward between some grassy mounds without headstones—graves of Christian natives who had lived on the monastic lands. "It's always the way," he grumbled. "Day in and day out I work at this place, and what with drought or too much rain, and Father Mark always wanting flowers for the church and Father Superior always changing his mind about this and that, there's never a chance for anything. And when I *do* raise a decent lot of seedlings, some great oaf steps on them, right away." And he bent over the dock leaf with the solicitude of a mother.

Dick knew that one should never take Father Augustine seriously; besides, there was this curious peace in his heart. "I'm sorry, Father," he said gently, "but

there's no great harm done. Where do you want them planted? I've an hour to spare; let me give you a hand."

"They're for Bishop Fellows' grave." The old man was slightly mollified. "The petunias are over, and I've some geranium cuttings over there."

Together they passed among the mounds to the tomb of the first bishop of the diocese and the Superior, in his time, of the Community. It lay almost in the shadow of the church, and, as one passed the rustic gate, stood at the head, as it were, of the graveyard. It was as if, in death, the bones of the saintly prelate still kept his old office and held watch and ward over the silent company about them. Here was a Pieta in a shrine and before it the Latin cross of a great flower-bed. In the centre lay the stone slab of the grave itself, embossed with the mitre and crosier, with a simple inscription. The cross had been newly dug and cleaned, and was neatly bedded out with geraniums—the old man's morning work. Now he and Dick, crouching side by side, worked steadily and silently at the lobelia.

One crumbled the hard soil, made a small hole, trickled in an ounce or two of water, and tenderly embedded the frail plant. Then on a few inches, and another; on again, and another; and now the place of the next was a bit too far to reach, and one must shuffle along a pace or two. Augustine shot out occasional comments.

"It's never better than with geraniums and lobelia."

"No?" queried Dick, absent-mindedly.

"No. I said so. But Father Superior doesn't like 'em. Suburban, he says. As if that mattered in Africa! Besides, as I've said to him time and again, what else would you have? Petunias straggle here: too hot. Zinnias are too tall."

"I thought I remembered it as a rose-bed."

"You did. That was his idea. Fiddle-sticks! You can't keep the shape of the bed with roses. Not here. Want a dozen gardeners and hot-houses for a place like this."

"It seems to me that it is always charming, Father."

The old man grunted. "You'd not think so, to listen to him."

"I'm certain he doesn't mean to grumble."

"Well, he does."

Dick straightened himself at last. "That's the lot," he said, surveying the bed. "I must go and wash if I'm to be in time for Office."

As he spoke the first bell of the Angelus rang out. He took off his hat and signed himself. Augustine slowly rose, commencing to say his prayers at the second peal. As the last bells began, he spoke. "You've five minutes," he said. "It's not enough for old bones sometimes."

Dick finished and signed himself again. "I must hurry," he said and walked quickly away.

He passed a little later into the quiet chapel that also served as the church of the neighbourhood. He knelt on the right, half-way up the aisle, and watched the community file into the choir beyond the rood-screen. They had come from various work in the house and garden and farm, and their boots clattered on the stone. Brother Martin knelt heavily and mopped his face. Father Thomas was last, and almost late. Father Augustine looked shabby and old, and had plainly but rinsed his hands at the garden tap and forgotten to let down his cassock until the last moment. Father Superior was not there: Dick guessed he was with the Bishop. The Sub-Prior commenced the Office. "*In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.*"

Dick sat back as the Latin began to roll sonorously from side to side of the choir. A dozen or more of secular

priests, up for the Retreat as he himself, were dotted about the nave, but Dick gave them no second thought. The singular content which had been his since he left the Bishop still kept his soul. He allowed his eyes to stray, as if he were a stranger, from object to object of devotion about him. He was familiar with the little house of God, since, throughout the years he had been in Africa, this had been his spiritual second home. Much as he loved his own church and his mission, the monastery, a day's journey away by horse and rail, had been the quiet centre upon which he could fall back when spiritually in need of help or physically and mentally of rest. He knew it well, then, and its inmates, and they him—more than they knew the majority of the other seculars in the diocese. He had helped Father Mark (who was the carpenter of the Community) to erect the memorial crucifix against the north wall on one of his visits. He had regilt some of the stars in the blue canopy of the High Altar. He had agreed with Father Ignatius (the Vicar of the monastic parish) that the new confessional in the south aisle was a necessity—against the Father Superior who had felt it would tend to obscure the shrine of St. Anthony. His own mission had subscribed to present the Michael Archangel (his too steely sword beautifully stained with the reddest blood from the expiring dragon at his feet) who stood in a niche of the screen to the right as one entered the sanctuary. There were five niches, and it was the only one filled. Even now Dick felt a suspicion of pride and half smiled to himself. Five missions had promised gifts, but none other had come up to scratch! More than all, he and Lauriston, up together from Penluma on the occasion of the last episcopal charge, had laboured two days at carting the stone for Our Lady of Lourdes, the blue of whose mantle he could just see out of the corner of his right eye.

The church was not old for Europe, but respectably aged for Africa. Its dark wood beams and walls had become to him as venerable as cathedral stone. The coloured lights that the African sun threw upon the stone flags from the violent reds and blues and oranges and violets of the cheap glass, comforted him now almost as much as the richly bedight windows of his school chapel had used to do. And the poor copy of Murillo's Assumption over the altar, which had so pleased Father Ignatius when it had been sent from a parish in England that had no further need for it in their new and magnificent building, rested his eyes as perhaps the lovely original had never done in the Cathedral of his ordination.

Behind him, the door of the cool porch was wide open. Sounds drifted in: the chatter of Sesuto as the native children went home down the road from morning school; the twittering of the weaver-birds in the big willow that almost overhung the entry; even the piping of a native herd-boy watching goats among the rocks across the way. It was so cool and dark and still within, when, behind one's consciousness, the tide of the noontide sun fell blistering on the rocks and dust without and the busy world went by. In the store a mile away, there would be sweaty dirty natives, naked to the waist, manhandling sacks of mealies and packs of wool, and unshaven half-dressed white men swearing at them and spitting into the filth of the yard. From afar came the whistle of the midday luggage train creaking and jolting through the Poort and halting at the little station from which he would leave on the morrow. There would be clanging and shouting and slow heavy labour down there, with a Boer passenger or two, boots on the seat opposite, looking out of the one passenger coach. There might be a Ford, half derelict in the sun, by the corrugated iron shed,

and perhaps a wagon, outspanned, its sixteen pair of oxen, with great moist eyes, crouched in the dust by their yokes and chains, chewing the cud the while. And the flies would be tormenting them all the time, in the stale dead heat.

His wandering thoughts were recalled by the Sub-Prior's voice speaking aloud. "*Oremus. Deus, qui beatum Philip-pum, Confessorem tuum, Sanctorum tuorum gloria sublimasti : . . .*" Of course. It was the day of Philip Neri. He had forgotten. How did it run? "*Concede propitius; ut cujus solemnitate lætamus, ejus virtutum proficiamus exemplo . . .*"

Dick sank his head into his hands. The sounding words recalled that great period of the renaissance of Catholicism in the spirit of which he had been educated. Theresa and the Sacred Heart; Ignatius and the Soldiers of Jesus; Philip Neri, Vincent de Paul and Saint Sulpice; Alphonso Maria and the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer; these were a chain of names, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, which stood for the modern thought and fashion of the Church. In a way they were names that meant more to him than those of the early saints. They had been the testimony of a Living Church. In their devotional methods he had been schooled and had himself schooled others. It was they, above all else, from whom he was separating himself, they who, in sombre modern dress, had clothed the Church in scarlet and gold.

The Community filed out of choir, strengthened and uplifted, and the small congregation of his secular brethren followed them with the great saint for their guide. Dick hardly noticed, until, raising his head, he was suddenly aware that he was alone.

IV

From that moment he was conscious all the time of his

dereliction. Relief had waned and passed. The simple details of the place and of the life of the place impressed him, about to leave, almost as if this were the first visit he had paid. To the dying, small things mean much. At his place in the Refectory, he noted with eyes keen from sorrowful anticipation, the scrupulous cleanliness of the bare tables, of the few utensils, of the walls and floor. The scrubbed wood, the whitewashed walls, the enamelled crockery, the brown habits of the brethren, the black and white crucifix, the home-made loaves, the big salt cellar, the dark red earthenware pitchers of water, the baked potatoes, the dish of beans, the piled hissing fragrant chops, the creamy rice pudding, the crisp green of the lettuce, and the yellow cheese—all these had the instant familiarity of a home. They were the essentials of life, without artificial garnishing. Simplicity graced both the room and the food. One could understand how easily Francis made with Clare a sacrament of a meal. Father Superior sat erect at the head of the table, with clean-cut face and steely eyes, but with the grave kindness of host and father. Father Anselm read aloud from the lectionary, first a portion of the first epistle to the Corinthians and then from "The Practice of the Presence of God," by Brother Lawrence: "*That he had been footman to Monsieur Fieubert, the treasurer, and that he was a great awkward fellow who broke everything. . . . That he had desired to be received into a monastery, thinking that he would then be made to smart for his awkwardness and the faults he should commit, and so he would sacrifice to God his life, with its pleasures; but that God had disappointed him, he having met with nothing but satisfaction in that state. . .*" And so on, till Father Superior pushed back his chair and all rose for the Grace.

Outside, the lay brethren mostly left at once ~~on their~~

own affairs, and there was bustle of departing priests who had to reach more distant missions and leave by the train that passed the Poort in a few minutes, but the rest, with Father Superior in the centre, drew chairs into a semi-circle, lit pipes and chatted through a half-hour of recreation. The talk was of homely affairs. Father Thomas had to explain exactly why it would take two more days to finish the reservoir. Father Augustine reopened the re-se-bed controversy, or at least attempted to do so. Father Ignatius sought a companion for a ride to the native village, and tried to capture Dick who was promptly claimed by Father Thomas. Brother Bernard reported that a cow had calved and that the Rhode Island Reds undoubtedly beat the White Leghorns in egg-laying so far as *his* fowls were concerned. Father Lear, the Superior, discussed easily with a Canon of the Cathedral Unamuno's *Tragic Sense of Life* which had just reached them.

Presently he tapped out his pipe and rose. "When do you leave us for Penluma, Father Thurstan?" he asked Dick kindly.

"Not till to-morrow after breakfast, if I may stay so long, Father," replied Dick.

"Certainly. You know it is always a pleasure to have you. Come to my room after supper for a chat before Benediction, will you? I want your advice on the Manual."

Dick looked him frankly in the face, suspecting that he knew his secret, but could read nothing of import there. "Thanks, Father. I should be delighted," he said.

Father Thomas came up, in riding breeches and an old coat. "The horses will be at the porch in a minute, Father," he said genially, "if you're coming."

"Right-o," rejoined Dick. "Half a jiffy." He nodded to the Superior, who smiled on him, and ran off to change, glad of action.

They two rode down into the plain over the rough road in the heat of the afternoon sun. The nearer lands had already been reaped ; and they rode over the stubble, among the stalks of which native cattle were seeking the bare living upon which they subsist, herded by a few naked brown urchins who were at play upon miniature wars with the longest dried mealie-stalks they could find. Then, among the Kaffir corn itself, Clementi came up to greet them, his ugly black face all smiles, an old deer-stalker crowning his wool. Thomas got off to talk to him, and Dick pushed his horse on to the line of women and girls who were snipping off the great bushy brown heads of African millet and collecting them in baskets. They greeted him familiarly, grinning their pleasure. "Lumela, ntate, lumela !" There was still a deal to cut, and the field billowed and shimmered and rustled as the wind passed over it, right up to the outermost rocks of the two kopjes. On their stony sides, red-hot pokers were ablaze and clumps of yellow thistles, and grey lichens covered the face of the rocks. Thomas joined him, and they went over to the shade of a wind-twisted juniper, where Clementi gave them a drink out of a calabash of cool native beer. And then, there being time, they made their way home by the track that led through the kitchen gardens, cow byres and chicken runs of the monastery, finding Brother Bernard with a basket of big brown eggs to prove that he was indubitably right about the Rhode Island Reds. The homely simplicity of it all, at each familiar scene and phase, wrung Dick's heart.

He said his office, without yet questioning the daily habit, before the evening meal at sundown, and after it, in the dusk, made his way to the rondhavel of the Father Superior which stood a little apart in the grounds. On the terrace, Brother Francis accosted him with a smile to ask at what hour he wished to say Mass on the morrow.

It flashed then through Dick's mind that this would be his last Mass at the monastery, and in the moment he knew that he would like Brother Francis, a simple, brotherly, kindly soul to be there. "Oh, as usual, brother," he said, steadying his voice. "Six o'clock. Do you think you could serve me yourself?"

"Sure, Father. I'd be pleased."

"Well, do." He hesitated. "I've a special intention. For peculiar grace and help at this time," he added.

The brother nodded. "At six, then, Father," he said. "You'll have Our Lady's altar?"

Dick smiled with a new pang. He knew the offer of Our Lady's altar to be a special favour. "Thanks," he said. "Yes, I'd like to—to say Good-bye there. Good-night."

"Good-night, Father. Pray for me."

"*Oremus pro invicem,*," replied Dick, and passed on.

Father Lear bade him welcome and told him to take a chair. He himself was seated at his desk, busy with a sheaf of proof, and he wished to consult Dick on a few points. It was a new Sesuto book of devotion which was in preparation, and Dick, as a Mission priest who would normally have come to use it when it was ready, was worthy of consultation. He almost forgot that he would not be there to see its completion, in the discussion of grammatical points, as well as of arrangement and contents, that ensued. In the yellow lamplight, with the crickets shrilling about them outside and the radiance of an African moon lighting the garden, their heads bent together over the pages. There was little time left for discussion, before Benediction and Silence, when they had finished. But, laying down his pen at last, remembrance returned to Dick.

Father Lear leaned back with a sigh. "Good. That's finished. Have a cigarette? There's time before chapel."

"Thanks," said Dick, taking and lighting one. He transferred himself from the upright seat at the desk to a steamer-chair in the doorway as he did so. He could stare out into the quiet night and face his own thoughts there.

Father Lear turned his own chair about and watched him. Thus they sat for awhile in silence, the points of their cigarettes glowing in the half-dark. They were friends, in a sense, these two. Dick liked the elder man, and respected him to boot, and the elder knew a little of the other's doubts and fears. They were a mood of youth that would pass, he thought, when he remembered them.

Thus it was Dick who gave himself away, deliberately. It seemed to him that he must speak. "I say," he said suddenly, "I should like to tell you. I—I shall not see you again after to-morrow."

There was a moment's silence. "Why?" asked the other calmly.

"Because the doubts I have often discussed with you, have come to a head. I told the Bishop this morning that I was finished. I made the Retreat decisive. I can't go on. I'm clearing out on Monday."

Father Lear could not repress a gesture of sorrow and astonishment. "What!" he cried. "It has not come to that!"

Dick nodded.

"But, my dear boy, for Christ's sake think what you are doing. In all my experience I have not known such a thing! You, a priest, deliberately to turn your back on God! On Our Lady and all Saints! To renounce all your previous spiritual experience! To deny the grace of your Orders! *You!* It's incredible. I can't believe it. You're mad to think of it!"

"That puts the cart before the horse," retorted Dick quietly.

"How do you mean?"

Dick did not immediately reply. He wanted to frame his answer so that it should end discussion. At last: "I knew a fellow at Oxford whose father was one of the extreme High Anglicans," he said. "He started Reservation and Benediction and all the rest, and when his Bishop censured him he said: 'My Lord, I have had deep spiritual experience of the Sacramental Presence of our Lord in the Reserved Sacrament.' And do you know what the Bishop replied? 'Then, Mr. Hexford, you will forgive me if I treat you as a Nonconformist!'"

Father Lear did not even smile. But he spoke more quietly. "I acknowledge the point," he said, "and there is something in it. It is, of course, the authority of the Church that is in question. You mean that a Catholic should rest on the Church and not on his feelings. But, nevertheless, when our inmost spiritual experience confirms the plain reading of history and——"

"Father Lear," interrupted Dick, "have you read much Astronomy?"

The Father Superior obviously hesitated. The seemingly irrelevant interruption was characteristic, but it angered him. Then he took control of himself. "My dear brother," he began.

"Because," went on Dick, "the reason why I know I must resign is as deep as that. It is not some minor question of faith or practice, such as we've often discussed; it's a deep-rooted cosmic doubt. The Christian religion was founded by men (Lear made a gesture of horrified denial) who believed that the Earth was the only stable world and the centre of the universe. Who believed that man was the special and particular creation of God designed to do His Will in that specially prepared and unique world. Well, I don't believe that. I can't. It is to be absurdly terrestrial and unscientific. Here

are we, tiny parasites on an insignificant planet of one of the smaller stars of the Milky Way. To trust the testimony of men whose minds were as limited in conception as were those of the Apostles is as sensible as to trust the minds of heathen Basuto as to the existence of their devils."

"The Church was not founded by——" began Lear.

Dick waved him aside. "Father Lear," he said, "let me finish. And if that was the beginning, the end has been as bad. Our Christology was worked out by men whose minds were wholly anthropomorphic too, who could not think in other terms. Our sacraments, our doctrine of sin and of grace, our stories of the saints, our devotional mysticism, fall like a pack of cards at that touch. Catholicism is as lovely as—as a Gothic cathedral, but if you ask me to believe that a Gothic cathedral is unique in beauty, the supreme design of God, the eternal and unchanging best in the stellar universe, and the pattern of Heaven itself, I cannot do it."

"In other words," said Lear deliberately, "man is too small for God."

"In other words," retorted Dick, "man has now outgrown his cradle. Moreover, climbing out of it, he is aware that it is not, as he thought, the entire universe, nor he a particular creation."

In the distance a bell rang. Both men got up. Leareyed the other with something of horror in his eyes. Then :

"Did I hear you aright? You have decided to give way finally to such temptations of the Devil, to renounce your Orders, to go?"

Dick's heart sank at the other's tone, but he answered bravely enough.

"To go, yes."

"You literally mean it? You have declared that intention to the Bishop?"

"Yes. It nearly broke my heart to do it, but it's done."

"Forgive me. Your heart seems a minor point. . . . Are you ministering on Sunday?"

"Yes. For the last time. You see——"

Father Lear cut him short with a gesture. "I do not want explanations of your peculiar frame of mind. The Bishop allows this?"

A kind of fear took cold possession of Dick. He saw, suddenly, what might be coming. "Of course. Do you suppose I should do so otherwise?" he demanded.

Father Lear shrugged his shoulders. "Well, that is his affair. I do not presume to comment upon it. But the jurisdiction of the Community chapel belongs to me. You must understand that you cannot have an altar to-morrow, and, Father Thurstan, I fear I must say that I would rather you caught the early train."

They stood for a moment in silence, staring at each other. Then Dick's face changed. "I understand," he said brokenly. "You are probably quite right. Good-night, Father. And Good-bye."

Father Lear bowed. "Good-bye," he said. "May God have mercy upon you."

"I pray so," said Dick, and, turning, passed out into the night.

CHAPTER II

Horse-Hoofs on a Hard Road

I

THE following Sunday, Dick awoke early. He was instantly wide awake, in the grip of the realisation that he was back at Penluma for the last time. As he lay in bed, he could see through the open window a stretch

of that harsh mission land which had just yielded him a poor harvest of oats, with a vlei below of luxuriant weeping willows, whose long trailing branches swept the marshy ground at the foot. Beyond rose the slight hill which, withal it was itself but a few hundred feet in height, hid from his sight the towering Range ten miles as the crow flies behind it. Dick saw no parable there, however.

Through the thin partition, he could hear his boys at work in the kitchen. Philip was whistling to himself. Andrew was cutting wood. He knew Philip's whistle, and the other, whose rhythmic blows with the axe made a kind of music too, must be Andrew. Outside, birds were chirping in the cluster of tall blue-gums to the left of his little cottage. In the village, cocks were crowing. It was high time to get up.

He threw back the blankets and swung his legs off the narrow cot. Sitting there, he paused. He was getting from that bed for the last time. . . . Mentally, he shook himself, and hurried to the bathroom for a cold shower and a shave.

As he left the house in his cassock, a few minutes later, Philip followed him. Philip was one of the few who knew he was going for more than a temporary vacation. It had been impossible to hide it from a few—the sisters of the Convent, the old schoolmaster, Philip. . . . He could not deceive them. Among the rest the news was already swiftly running through the villages, in the astonishing native way, that he was "going away for a time."

"Father, will you hear my confession?" asked Philip.

Dick looked him in the eyes and read what lay behind. Father Lauriston had been there Friday to hear confessions, but Philip had waited for him. The boy's black face, soft brown eyes, well-shaped chin, intelligent

forehead, clustering curly woolly hair, were very dear to him. They two had shared food and blankets and a flickering camp-fire on the lonely heights too often for him not to hold him dear. How often had Philip risen before dawn and tramped miles half-frozen to seek the straying horses! How often had he foraged around for food and worked an extra hour or two in some village when Dick was too tired to move! Still more, how often had he knelt to serve his father's Mass at an altar in the wilderness, in lonely mission out-stations, in native huts, leading the ignorant people in their prayers, with such devotion, himself! And, now, Philip wanted to make his confession to him for the last time. . . . His own eyes dropped from those of the native whom it seemed to him he was about as it were to betray. . . . "Yes," he said, and turned away.

He walked down to his garden gate through the masses of snapdragon and lupin and delphinium and penstemon that he had cultivated so dearly. Over the gate, a Dorothy Perkins, planted three years before all but with prayers, hung in glorious masses of flower. In the narrow lane, as he turned to the right, the very fence held memories. At the corner, on the dusty road, Mateo was grooming the horses. Swiftsure whinnied to him. He half stopped; then thought better of it and hurried on.

Though so early, groups of natives were sitting on the grass all about the church. Normally his heart would have sunk at the sight of them. All these years he had been trying to persuade them that a parish priest, with a big parish and innumerable Sunday duties, had no time to hear confessions on Sunday before the Sung Mass. Yet nearly always some were there, to cut short his own time for meditation and preparation. Some were there—a few, definitely, through laziness and carelessness, who

could have come on the Friday or Saturday, but some who had already ridden on horseback or tramped on foot for a couple of hours or more, in the dark, over hill and valley, up rocky paths, across stretches of veld, so that they might not miss their Lord. Such he could never blame. Least of all to-day. Indeed, he walked deliberately among the groups that rose to greet and follow him into church, smiling and blessing them. And as he went, his real self watched and noted all he did, stricken through with desolation, dumb with a sense of loss.

Within, Sister Angela was moving about the High Altar. Thank God he had not yet to meet *her* eyes! Otherwise the place was hushed, with that still, assured, clean, fresh air he knew so well. The early sun flooded in through the unstained windows. There were no dark corners. There were few seats or pews. The church itself a simple rectangle, the choir was raised high by stone steps with a low balustrade, and by two further flights of three, one ascended to the High Altar. It was all spacious and open. It was hard, even now, to believe that it did not wait expectantly for something. It seemed to him always to have that air. And it was still so homely, so very friendly. . . .

He crossed the central space, making his genuflection, and knelt at the side altar, newly erected, of St. Anthony. It was placed back to the wall, easy of access as all else in the place. Anthony held out the Child Jesus. On the altar step some natives had placed a bunch of flowers, a basket of eggs and a couple of candles. He heard his little following shuffle over the mats on the floor, some seeking the big crucifix, others the altar and shrine of Our Lady, a few penitents the place reserved for them under the shadow of the statue of St. Michael, a replica of that which the parish had given to the monastery. He hid his face, and knew he could not pray. . . .

But there grew in his soul a sense of resignation. In a while, he opened his books and read his normal Office of preparation, calmly, quietly. He made his intentions. What after all, did he know of himself, of the illimitable unseen and unheard about him, of the very stuff and texture of the floor on which he knelt, of the wood against which he leaned? What would he know of the white disk he was so soon to hold in his hands, though it were but paste to outward seeming? Nothing, absolutely nothing. He took refuge in mystery. As a child in the dark, the flicker of his candle merely revealed more dark. But it *did* reveal the dark, and he was all the time being asked to profess that it revealed a great assurance, somewhere, of some sort. The Church said so. Well, for to-day the Church should say so once again through his lips, say what *She* believed, but after that, after that . . . He must believe his own eyes, weak though they be.

Clinging to that poor consolation, he rose, passed into the sacristy, put on his cotta, took his stole and went out to the confessional. There, one by one, those ignorant sick souls came to him, confessing with the simplicity of children the immemorial sins of the world. One by one he heard them, and the trained priest of the last ten years directed them to this or that, asked a question or two, appointed a penance, and gathered itself up to make the supreme gesture, to say the infinite words. He tried to feel that it was not Dick Thurstan who was saying and doing this. But he, Dick Thurstan, watched the gestures and heard the words of that other personality with a kind of surrendered surprise. It was amazing that it should still function so efficiently. So far as these penitents were concerned, it was as if all were true. Only, only—well, he must not think of *that* just now.

The stream ceased. He rose, knelt briefly at the altar, and went down to the door to mark the roll of

those public penitents whose sins having been an open scandal were being put to public penance. They knelt as he approached, and, fluttering the pages of the register, he looked them over. Once again wonder took the place temporarily of doubt or fear. These old women, huddled in blankets, the marks of the beast in them plain upon the face for all to see; that young man, kneeling upright, with his eyes on the Cross and the impenetrable expression of ageless Africa therein; those two old men, all but habitual drunkards, whose last bout had ended in the grossest incest; this girl, but seventeen, who, on the night of the feast, had not come home, and then in tears, no longer a virgin; what did the Lord God make of them? What *could* He make of them? Purgatory? And then, at length, Heaven? After a new creation, to all practical intent? So he had forced himself to teach. Well, it was a theory of—of— No. He must not allow himself to think, this last day. . . .

He prayed with them. *Our Father. Hail Mary. Glory be. Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, hail. The Divine Praises. The Anima Christi.* They repeated all after him in the vowelised Sesuto, more lovely even than the Latin, and they sat, when he ordered them, while he briefly spoke. First, practically: that he would set their affairs plainly forth for the next priest that there might not be delay or mistake; that they must remember the individual priest mattered not at all; that if they remained penitent, absolution would be given before Corpus Christi, as arranged. . . . And then a pause: what next: What had Dick Thurstan, leaving his charge and renouncing his vows that night, to say of sin?

“And now remember I may never see your faces again—in this life, and you are all very dear to me. Can you believe that of me, who have been your Father? Very well, then, remember what the Catholic Church has

taught us all, speaking as a loving Mother to the children about her knees. She says you are very dear also to the Holy Family of God. It was not so much other people whom you injured by your sins, she says, but the dear Lord Who died for you on the cross of Calvary, and Himself. Him you, as it were, struck in the Face, spat upon, crucified. And into the heart of His Mother, the tender loving Mother, you drove a spear. And the very face of Almighty God was hidden by your sin.

"Yet, she says, they wait tenderly for you to come back. Jesus Christ has never changed. He waits to pardon you, to bless you. Mary waits to intercede for you before the Throne of God. Yours may be again a seat among the faithful, the hope of the redeemed, the reward of the saint. Ah, my children, what else have you in this fleeting life? Where would you—each one of you—be, without this hope in the hour of death and in the day of judgment? Therefore remain faithful to your promises of penitence. Do not again put out the light of grace which is as the lighted candle you received in baptism and hope to have restored to your hands. And may the Lord bless you all, and keep you; and may the souls of the faithful departed ~~✕~~ rest in peace."

As he started back to the sacristy, old John Tumane began to ring the great bell. Instantly there was bustle and eagerness behind him. The congregation was pouring into church, shuffle, shuffle, shuffle over the mats—the little children, the grave fathers, the slow-moving, desperately simple women. He could hear them jostling each other a little at the holy water stoups. And the old bell rang and rang—a mere noise some of his white parishioners called it; but it meant more than that to these simple souls, and to him. It heralded the moment of the whole week for which he had always lived in expectation, the hour that had seemed to him the best.

The people felt it, too. As he moved about for a while, seeing to this and that as the parish priest of such a mission must, he missed little of the crowding congregation below. There was old blind Nathaniel being shepherded to his place, genuflecting with so stiff a knee, seating himself slowly with the aid of his stick, and leaning forward a little, an intent look on his aged grizzled face. There was "Father" Abraham, as he and Sister Veronica called him sometimes in joke, old Father Abraham who had been converted late in life and who, if he lived with only one wife technically, still maintained in all else the patriarchal style. His village, and several with it along the ridge, had almost entirely embraced the Faith through the influence of that one old man who was now watching intently the settling down in a row before him of his sons and grandsons and obviously counting heads. And on the women's side, how they poured in!—like clucking hens, settling themselves on the floor in their voluminous skirts, untying prayer book and hymn book from odd-shaped bundles, making a place for babies, feeling to be certain that the "tikki" for the collection was secure in a fold of their handkerchiefs. Old Agnesi was there, who invariably gave up her hut, beautifully cleaned, for the use of her Lord when He came to her village in the sacrament. Deborah, too, the one Christian wife of a chief who obstinately resisted the faith. Claudia, who had seen him, Dick, in a dream, coming in and laying hands upon her, and had been converted in consequence. Sara Maria, who must have walked two hours and a half at least, and who had built a chapel in her mountain hamlet, and furnished it, and was inconveniently importunate that it might be made a "station." And Job, the West African negro, and David, the Griqua, and Josepha, the converted wizard who had given proof of his sincerity by consenting to attend instruction

without the gift of a pair of trousers. There, too, was Stephen, young, eager, musical, who led the singing; with him Dick entered the sacristy to settle the details.

Thereafter he washed his hands, signed himself and commenced to robe. Within the church, he could hear the rumble of many voices as Paul Maria, the catechist, led the congregation in the simple preparatory prayers that had been his own composition. He kissed the folded amice, threw it over his head and tied it. Within, led by Paul, they prayed: "Oh, my God—I come to offer Thee—this sacrifice—of the holy Mass—for my sins and for those of the whole world." So ran the spaced thunder of their prayer. He slipped into the alb, and girt himself. "Look—with the eyes of Thy mercy—not upon me—but upon the Lamb of God—Who will offer Himself—on this altar—for us sinners." He took the maniple, kissed the cross, and put it on his left arm. Then the stole, crosswise, fastening each part with the cords of the girdle. "I offer Thee—this sacrifice of the Mass—in communion with—all saints—and Thy whole Church—for my own salvation—for the conversion of the heathen—for the strengthening of Christians—for the souls of the faithful departed." But with his hands under the first fold of the chasuble, he hesitated. Once again he remembered acutely: he was wearing it for the last time. . . . Emotion almost overpowered him. He bent forward a little over the table: even the server noticed and half stepped forward to see if he wanted anything. "Hail, Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with thee," boomed from within the church. Dick with an effort recollected himself and slipped the chasuble over his head.

As he entered, all stood. He intoned the antiphon of the Asperges. Behind him Stephen took up the psalm, and all joined in. He genuflected, turned, and moved

down the crowded church, sprinkling right and left. The people had to make way for him as he moved through the mass of them to the door and back again, so thick they stood. How glorious it was to feel the sincerity and joyfulness of a whole people like this! Would the next shepherd care, as he cared, for his sheep? Would he see that Nathaniel got the touch of holy water for which in his blindness he was so eager? Would he remember the catechumens especially, to whom it meant so much? Would he—but Dick was back at the altar, intoning the versicle. Every soul in the place must have made the response. . . . "*Oremus.* . . ."

Then he settled down to the part of a machine—for, the last time. Yet even as the almost mechanical action went on, as he passed point by point, place by place, in the solemn ceremonial—the first kiss of the altar-stone, the first incensing, the Introit, the Kyrie, the Gloria in excelsis Deo, all these and the rest—there was one thought ever with him. Never again. For the last time. That is over—that—that. At last the Credo. "*Credo in unum Deum,*" he sang. "*Patrem omnipotentem, Factorem cæli et terræ,*" the voice of Stephen rang out behind. Then even Stephen's voice was drowned as the people joined in. Dick finished quickly and left the altar to remove his chasuble.

The last sermon at a last Mass!—with all those hundreds of simple souls agog to hear, some of the women weeping audibly as he told them of his going, confirming irrevocably the news they all had heard. All eyes were fixed upon him, piercing him, reading his mind, as it seemed. Only, in fact, they did no such thing: they only listened dumbly, wondering mostly what they would do without him. He had little indeed to say. . . .

Too soon the supreme moment had arrived. For the last time he faced them, singing "*Sursum Corda,*" shaken

to his soul's foundation with their: "*Habemus ad Dominum.*" He joined his hands and bowed his head: "*Gratias agamus Domino Deo nostro.*" They replied. At the Sanctus, the torch-bearers came in. He gripped his reeling thought and commenced the Canon, kissing the altar, signing rapidly the oblations. The "*Hosanna in excelsis Deo*" died away behind him. All was still. The warning bell rang out at the extension of his hands. He could hear, with that acute second consciousness of his, the faint rustle among the people. Then the utter silence. . . .

Hoc est enim corpus meum.

Behind him the bells rang and rang, the torches were uplifted, the people bowed themselves. Above him, outside, the great bell tolled that all might know, wherever they might be. Stephen was leading them in the "*Benedictus.*" Dick had offered the Church's sacrifice for the last time.

"Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis."

II

Twenty minutes later, clad in cassock and biretta, he came out into the sunshine to face the real ordeal. Up to now, before Mass, no one had spoken to him or he to them unnecessary words: now there would be no excuse. On the top step leading from the sacristy to the open air, he paused, and his heart sank. The ordeal was about to begin.

The five natives clustered in a little group. "Father" Abraham leant heavily on a stick, dressed in riding breeches and an old khaki coat, his heavy face, with the grey stubble on it, clouded as a child's. Nathaniel sat on the grass, barefoot, his thin shrunk calves projecting from old flannel trousers, his face bent forward with the intent gesture of the blind. The old school-

master, who was not really old, only he had been at Penluma so long, stood with his hands behind his back, a short man in a weather-stained Norfolk suit, a grass stalk between his lips, with a curiously alert perky kind of face, bright-eyed as a bird. Paul Maria had his hands in his pockets, wore boots and a battered straw hat, stood erect and looked what he felt—lost, bewildered, stricken. Dick knew what he was to Paul Maria, Paul Maria who never slacked, who had some honest grasp of the history and significance of the Church, upon whose out-station one could almost always rely. And last of all Stephen, carefully and neatly dressed, young, fresh-looking, with more than the gentlemanliness and intelligence of a white man of his age and station. Stephen worked in a store during the week, and had a delightful house and a couple of sturdy children. Stephen it was who had led the way in that shouldering of accounts by the natives which had made the Mission financially solvent. No other five could have represented the men of the congregation better. Yet this was no appointed delegation.

“Good-morning, Father,” said the schoolmaster.

“Good-morning,” replied Dick, and took the bull by the horns. “So I suppose you have all heard that I am going away?”

“It is so awfully sudden,” said Stephen, speaking English without the trace of an accent. “I could not believe the news when my wife brought it me.”

“I know, Stephen,” rejoined Dick. “It is sudden. I cannot explain the whole matter to you, but I saw the Bishop after the Retreat and he agreed that I should leave to-night. After Benediction. I shall sleep at Hlakanelo with Father Lauriston and catch the train to-morrow. And I am more sorry to have to leave you than I can possibly say.”

“What does he say?” queried Nathaniel, whose English was little.

Dick repeated himself in Sesuto. He added: “The Bishop will not forget you. Another priest will be here for next Sunday. I think from the monastery—one who knows you all.”

“No one knows us as the Father. We shall be desolate without him.” This from Paul Maria.

“You mustn’t say that, Paul. A man matters little. You have Our Lord and the Saints.”

“Without their Father the children of the family will be scattered,” reiterated the man with conviction.

Abraham broke in. But what was it that the Father wanted? If there were difficulties about fodder for the horses, or if he were short of mealies, he had but to say the word. He had two sheep he had been fattening especially for the priest, and Sikuja should bring over in the morning chickens and eggs. If more were wanted—

“My dear friend,” interrupted Dick, “when have I once lacked anything among you? Do I not know that your house is my house, and that it is not necessary for me even to ask? This is no such matter. It is between my soul and the Lord Bishop, and—and God.”

“The Lord Bishop is sending the Father to another place,” retorted Paul Maria. He was convinced. “For many years have we feared this thing. We are lucky to have had the Father so long. Now the house that he has built will fall.”

“Paul,” cried Dick desperately, “you must not speak so. If it should turn out as you say, then indeed it is right that I should go and a pity that I did not go before. What! Is the Catholic Church built upon one priest? Do our people feed on *me*? Is it *I* that am their teacher? Have you learned from me no more than that in all these years?”

"Father, what you say is right," put in Stephen. "But it is not all the truth. Some priests understand us natives, and some do not. Some priests have gifts of speaking and of teaching which others have not. No priest that the Lord Bishop can send us will be to us what you have been. I agree with Paul."

"Many priests have I seen," said the old schoolmaster in Sesuto, "and none as the Father."

The old blind man shook his head slowly from side to side. "There is no one," he said.

Dick looked away from them, beyond them. Over the low stone wall a plantation of pine-trees began, and through their slim trunks the white road ran down-hill and out to the open veld. Sorrow and shame stormed in his heart. None as he knew his unworthiness; none how dear was all this to his soul. He asked nothing better than to remain. Momentarily he snatched at the opportunity. A line to the Bishop would do it, and a settling down more whole-heartedly to the service of these simple folk would follow. The Faith was good for them. What did it matter, after all, about himself? And if his doubts were correct, well, it would not matter here, and there would be no judgment hereafter.

But Stephen, all unconsciously, tipped the scale. "We have always trusted the Father," he said.

Dick recovered himself on the instant. "Yes, Stephen," he said, "and you shall continue to do so. You must trust me when I say that I would gladly, willingly, stay, and stay for ever, if I could. You must trust me when I tell you that I shall ride out to-night with a broken heart. I am as one who journeys not seeing the end. But if I stayed, I should be unworthy of your trust."

No one spoke for a minute. All recognised the finality of the tone. Stephen bowed his head and turned away.

Abraham openly wiped the tears from his eyes. But naturally they did not really understand.

"Oh, my friends, my dear friends," burst out Dick, "God keep and bless you always. But this thing is written. There is no escape. Let none of you be missing at Benediction. And let me go, now, that I may eat, for I have the classes and the midday prayers."

"That is so," said the schoolmaster conclusively.

"No one will leave the church all day," said Paul sadly.

Dick descended the steps slowly and passed through them. He saw Stephen help Nathaniel to his feet. Crossing the road, he was aware that groups had already formed about them on the grass, questioning eagerly.

III

Routine picked him up and carried him on. First or last day, a man must eat, and Dick was hungry for his late breakfast. Then he must read his Office, and smoke one pipe in the garden while he thought over his classes. Then the bell rang and the long spell of teaching commenced. In the schoolhouse, a hundred or more "hearers" gathered, heathen who were preparing for entrance into the Catechumenate. In the church, thereafter, sitting on the floor about the Baptistry, as many more catechumens were under instruction for Baptism. After all that, there followed his own more particular class: instruction for First Communion. Sister Monica, young and zealous, had the Children of Mary, and he must needs just look in on them. At the door of the Convent the Reverend Mother met him.

Slight, old, placid outwardly, she met him, her eyes downcast, her habit neat and prim. Only in after years did their relationship seem to Dick a curious one, and then, through a mist of time, it looked at once singularly artificial but rarely beautiful. He, the young priest;

she, the old saint. He, full of plans and eagerness, inclined to be unconventional in his ruling of the Mission, emotional, intellectually alive; she, wise in her years with a woman's wisdom, simply devotional, bravely setting her conservative and almost Puritan inclinations on one side, humble, holy. Daily she communicated, weekly made her confession. There he stood, guardian of her secret thoughts, on the edge of the world, and there she, mistress of her instincts, not far from the grave. Their relationship was strictly official, and she ruled her little branch-community without him; but yet, though neither had put it into words, Mother Agatha was very dear to him, and he to her. She was in the habit of asking his advice about little things: the chapel, the books in their small Sisters' library, the trivial affairs of the house. And he knew well enough that at prayer in that small quiet chapel she helped him bear the burden of souls.

On most Sundays and Festivals he was accustomed to sing Vespers with the nuns. The presence of the priest added to the ceremony and, as it were, blessed the little altar from time to time. Sometimes he would speak to them briefly, sitting with the small group of half-a-dozen women about him to talk of the spiritual life and of the saints, wondering if it would not have been more fitting if they had talked to him. On this, then, she questioned him.

"I beg your pardon, Father, but will you sing Vespers for us to-day?"

How peaceful it was in the little convent garden that they tended so carefully! From over the wall came the buzz of voices in the school adjoining; from a small orchard of peach trees, on the edge of the mealie patch, the chatter of the convent pupils. And how simple the question that hid so much!

Dick hesitated a second. He knew he was being

asked to say a formal farewell. The request hurt him far more than Father Lear's refusal of a somewhat similar farewell. But he could not refuse: indeed he did not want to refuse. "Yes, Sister," he said, "as usual. And may I say a few words afterwards?"

"We should all be very glad, Father," replied the placid voice.

"Right, then. I will not keep you ten minutes."

She smiled a little. "We would miss tea altogether if that were necessary, Father."

"There is no need for such a penance!" he said lightly, and turned quickly away.

The big bell was ringing again. Now assembled in the church hearers and catechumens and even the heathen, with as many Christians as cared, for the Stations, the Rosary and a short instruction. It was an hour that Dick loved. Unvested, he could walk among them, and he utilised the time to teach them prayers, litanies, tunes and hymns; to tell them stories; to explain some act in the ritual; to mingle with them. Sometimes he would call out all the children and teach them a child's prayer while the grown-ups sat and smiled—and learned so much. Sometimes he would make the whole congregation face one of the stations while he went into the detail of the picture, so normally unfamiliar to native eyes. He would explain the soldiers and their dress; the Roman Empire, so like the British in its way; the Jewish onlookers; the street, or the court of the Governor; the particular posture and suffering of the Saviour. Then they would all kneel, and he would pray in simple words bearing on what he had said. Or he would take an image or sacred picture, and explain that. Thus had the people come to love their church, and it was no uncommon thing for one to be seen taking heathen friends around, explaining and showing everything.

Thus, too, had Dick proved how truly Catholicism was a kindergarten religion, for those folk understood, with the faithful of the first centuries, such points as the reading of the Gospel to the north-west as a gesture of grace to the heathen, the significance of lights and vestments, the hidden meaning of Holy Week ceremonies, and the like. For this informal afternoon's instruction, then, the bell was ringing.

Back in his study, he stood racked in thought. What should he do, this last Sunday? How could he impress a last message on their easily-forgetful but singularly easily-influenced minds? He glanced about. His eyes fell on an image of the Good Shepherd, with a lamb in His arms, that stood on the mantelpiece. He picked it up and carried it with him into church. And at last, the service about to end and his teaching over, he placed it in an empty niche in the pulpit below which the children used to sit by themselves. "Let this last word of mine remain in your ears and hearts," he said. "Nothing is more familiar to you than the sight of sheep and of shepherds, and most of you know the Shepherd Psalm. And I place this figure here that you may see it whenever you enter the church, and pray for me. Pray also, too, that you may remain His sheep and hear His voice and follow Him, and that, as sheep protected by the shepherd, you may never feel yourselves deserted or alone."

Out again among the weeping people. Would the hours never pass? He smiled, he inquired of absentees, he jested with the elders, he caught up the children and refused to be sorrowful. Temporarily he could see that he banished their fears. They took colour from him. It was all so familiar that they could not believe this was an end. There was some mistake, beyond their understanding; but next Sunday he would still be there. The ways of all white men were mysterious, even of a beloved

priest. Only when he met Stephen or Philip, or even the blind eyes of Nathaniel, he dared not meet their gaze.

But now it was the hour for Vespers. The sun was throwing long oblique shadows and a golden haze was growing in the West. Out on the veld one could see a stir: the cattle being rounded up, the troops of horses being mustered. Dick turned in by the Convent gate and met the lay-sister going to feed the chickens. She was a good-humoured, rosy-checked country girl, and knew little of affairs. He smiled at her. "Hurry up, Sister. You'll be late."

"Oh, no, Father. There's been so much to do. Couldn't you just walk slowly?"

He required no such invitation; one walks slowly when one's heart is lead. Entering the Convent, the little chapel was on the left; the parlour, in which the vestments were set out, on the right. He glanced left and could see that the majority of the nuns were in their places already. Hearing his step, Sister Monica rose, lit a taper and began to light the altar candles. He turned in on the right, and picked up the Office book, with its markers in place, which had been put out for him. As he did so, he heard Sister Angela blowing up the charcoal of the censer which she would presently hand him. He put down the book and vested himself.

Once in his place, he had little to do but commence the Antiphons, intone the Versicles and pray the Prayers and Commendations. During the Psalms he sat there, his eyes on his book, his attention concentrated on the familiar, humble, holy, little place. The stained deal seats, the poor little altar, the carefully collected, treasured and repaired linen and fittings—he knew them so well. He even knew the stain on the small plaster image of Our Lady and could remember the joy of the Community when two brass vases had reached them from

England for her. His mind ran backwards. The first time he had said Mass here, his big missal had been difficult to place on the small altar. He had helped set the Tabernacle a little further back. Often and often he had opened that door to communicate these sisters, and once, in the dead of night, when Sister Ursula had lain a-dying. As he took the miniature censer and censured around and about and above at the Magnificat, he found himself thinking that never again would he have to fiddle with the tiny thing or try to be grave as he got in the ordained number of swings in a space that scarcely permitted them.

Vespers ended, he went out to unrobe, returning in his cotta for the little address. The convent children were coming back from the orchard and the Reverend Mother rose to close the chapel door. A chair had been set before the altar and he sat down in it. They too sat. And silence fell.

Poor Dick! The task was almost too hard. He could not lie and he must not speak the truth. He could not leave without a word of farewell and good cheer, but how was such as he to give that to such as they? He had to hold his emotion in hand, whose soul was a cockpit of emotions. He had to build up who was himself all broken down, to confirm in faith who now had no more than triumphant doubt. He had to be positive when he was all negative. He had fathered this little flock: he must now orphan it.

The old eyes of Mother Agatha were upon him, so tired, so sad, so full of yearning. He knew she guessed. Sister Monica, on the left of the door, had hers cast down, nor would she look up. She, too, would form her own conclusions; she, too, had had her doubts. They had discussed them together, with more sympathy than, perhaps, she would have found in a Father Lear. For

the rest it was sad enough that he was going, but the Bishop knew all about it, and they did not question why. Even the two who guessed did not guess the whole truth.

Like lightning the thoughts flashed back and forth in his brain. In five years, in ten, how many would still be here? The Reverend Mother would be with Sister Ursula he did not doubt, and Sister Monica might sit in her place. Would she endure as patiently, year in and year out, the thousand worries of her work, the little vexatious details of life in an African Mission? Sister Angela there,—day by day she would put out the vestments, and tell some other priest when the wine was running short, and complain of the quality of the candles, and blame the boys that they used too much charcoal. And the others—till the end? One by one dropping off, passing on, another and another coming forward, here, in this little chapel, in this peaceful garden, while behind, in the dusty road, the ox-waggon loaded up and the children shouted as they ran out of school. So small a kingdom it was—with the great Range on the horizon shutting out one aspect of the world as surely as their vows shut out the other. This and that feast-day, stepping-stones, while this and that season marked the miles. "*A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. . .*" But he must speak.

"*In the Name of the Father, ✠ the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen.* In the book of the prophecies of Isaiah, in the thirty-third chapter, '*Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty; they shall behold the land that is very far off.*'" . . .

IV

The troop of camp horses, fifty or more, were being herded up the street as he came out. A mounted policeman had the job of rounding them up on the veld and

starting them for home. Thereafter he had little to do, for the troop gradually broke up of its own accord as the horses of any particular stable reached their own familiar place. They raised a golden dust as they came, with swishing tails and low whinnies as if of farewell when this and that one dropped out. Dick stood to watch his four detach themselves; then he crossed the way and told Mateo to have Swiftsure saddled and bridled and waiting, with his saddle-bags on her, by the conclusion of Benediction.

His room wore its cheerful and normal appearance, as if to deceive him. One half of the little table bore his tea, and on the other lay the saddle-bags Philip had packed. In a corner his meagre trunk and a suitcase were also ready. For the rest nothing had as yet been changed. Dick stood thoughtfully and surveyed it for a moment. Then he called Philip.

The boy came in.

Dick crossed to the fireplace and leant upon the mantle. "Listen, Philip," he said, "to these orders. To-morrow, very early, have Spider put in the buggy and drive with my luggage there to Spuitveld station. I shall catch the ten-thirty a.m. train, and ride there myself from Hlakanelo. We will say good-bye on the platform. Afterwards you will drive back. I shall be riding Swiftsure, and he will follow the buggy. That is simple.

"But now listen carefully to the rest. Swiftsure is mine: I give him to you. The other horses belong to the Mission. Of the things here, that little desk is mine: Stephen is to have it. My *prie-Dieu*, my crucifix and my statue of Our Lady are for Paul Maria. To Nathaniel please give my old suit and my old flannel trousers, and, yes, all my old clothes that you haven't packed. Make them up into a bundle and send them to him. All my books are to go to the Sisters' Library. Abraham

Leukoane is to have my rug, the one we made from the sheep given us on our last trek. I think that is all. The rest belongs to the Mission."

"The Father has forgotten that the saddle and bridle and sjambok are his."

"I haven't. They're for you, with Swiftsure."

The boy cast down his eyes. "I cannot thank you as I ought, Father."

"Nonsense, Philip. And I wish I hadn't to give them!"

The boy said nothing. Dick's eyes roved the room. "Oh, my tobacco-jar! Give it to Nathaniel. He smokes, and he thinks it wonderful."

Even Philip smiled. It was a tobacco-jar made in the shape of a skull, a stupid relic of Dick's youth. But old Nathaniel, like an ancient hermit, would sit on the floor and run his sensitive fingers over it admiringly. Both knew it would delight his heart.

But Dick was still thinking. "There's something else, I know. You've packed the photographs, the books I told you, the clothes. Oh, yes! Where's my Corona?"

"I got it into the suitcase, Father."

"Then get it out to-morrow, Philip, and give it to the *moruti*.* He will work it with one finger, and be very happy."

The boy protested. "But the Father is always using his typewriter."

"Well, the Father won't be using his typewriter for some time, Philip. Or he thinks not. And if he does, he'll get a new one. Besides, I want that suitcase to be light. Well, that's all."

Dick crossed to the table and sat down. Philip did not move. "That's all," repeated the priest again, who wanted to be alone.

* The schoolmaster.

Philip came round the table. He stood there, his eyes eloquent and shining, but silent. As a native will, he clasped his hands.

Dick looked up. "Well, Philip, what is it?"

"Father, take me with you! I want no wage. I do not want Swiftsure, nor the saddle nor the bridle nor the sjambok, without the Father. Where he goes, I would go, and what he does, I would do. Take me, O my Father!"

Dick had not for a moment expected that. He was inexpressibly moved. "What!" he exclaimed, knowing the native mind, "you, Philip, the eldest son of your father and he a chief! And how could you leave the village? And have not the first cows passed in the matter of Theodora?"

"My father is nothing, the village and my lands are nothing, Theodora is nothing!" the boy burst out, eloquently. "I am the servant of my Father these many days. Have I not slept in his tent and tended his horses and fed him when there was little to eat? Have I not been his ox on the trail, even on the far trails, and shall he now go forth, I know not whither, alone? Who will bear his things and clean his boots and see that his horse, in that far land, does not stray? Ah! I go."

The priest heard him in amazement. This the phlegmatic Philip, faithful always, yes, but singularly undemonstrative! And useful he would be, indeed, in point of fact. Seeing what he had in mind, more than useful. Should he let him have his way, then, and take him?

But second thoughts followed swiftly. If he were only going on a holiday vacation, how good it would be! Or if he had any real hope of a return to faith. But no, even this last bitterness must be his. This last faithful heart must be disappointed, broken, for its own sake. Philip was a simple Catholic, and he did not know that.

his master was about to become an exile from the Church by his own decision and would shortly be a declared outlaw. He could not take Philip.

"It cannot be, Philip," he said.

"But why not, Father? Do I require much to eat or a great place in which to sleep? Can I not——"

"Philip, my dear son, it's no good. In many ways there is nothing I should like more than to take you. But it can't be done. I cannot tell you why; but it can't. The trail divides. I go into the valley; you go on along the ridge."

"But could I not descend into the valley later on, if down there the Father needs me?" The boy grasped at the straw.

Easy to say yes! Easy to put him off with a subterfuge! But Dick could not.

"No, Philip."

"Father!"

Dick turned to the table and reached for the tea-pot, controlling his voice. "That is all, now, my son. I'll see you to-morrow to say good-bye. Give Mateo my saddle-bags and see that he is ready with the horse."

Philip stood silent and still for a minute. Then he turned and went. When he had gone Dick put down his tea-pot and leant back in his chair. Through the open window, the West appeared already shot through with violet and gold, colours that heralded the crimson and purple of the sunset. But he saw none of the glory. . . .

The bell for Benediction surprised him. He poured out a belated cup of luke-warm tea, and drank it. Then he cut hastily a slice of bread and butter and ate that as he went about the room on a score of odd jobs. When the clock on the mantelshelf showed but three minutes to the hour, he went across to the church.

The servers were waiting for him, a hushed and silent

group about the sacristy door. All eyes were fixed upon him as he approached. He tried to smile.

If it had not been for that unusual air of expectancy about them all, he would have found it familiar. There was Michael, whose red cassock was several inches too short for him, blowing up the charcoal with that recklessness that Sister Angela deplored, and little Isaac, "Father" Abraham's youngest son, standing by with the incense-boat. John, the crucifer, tall, light in colour, with a singularly spiritual face—a man with a family—talked in hushed tones with the *moruti*. He and the two candle-bearers also wore red, but Dick saw with emotion that Andrew and Philip, his house-boys, had elected, out of rotation, to carry the lights that evening. The other John—Tumane—tollled the parish bell in its open-air belfry with his face turned towards the priest over his shoulder. Stephen, in black cassock and cotta, was standing a little apart, with anxious gloomy face, holding the paper of hymns in his hand. He always submitted it to the priest at the door and then went with it, ahead of him, to his stall in the sanctuary. And as Dick entered the sacristy, the server, whose duty it was to light the altar candles, came out with the extinguished taper in his hand from performing that office. Dick saw, to his surprise, that it was Paul Maria who had taken for that night his personal service. He had not expected such thoughtfulness.

He took the paper from Peter's hand mechanically, scarcely glancing at it. "That will do, Peter," he said. "I will leave the hymns to your choice to-night." The man said nothing, but entered the sanctuary.

As Dick vested he heard him give out the hymn. Presently he was wondering at the volume of voices singing *Star of the Sea*. Once ready, he came out with Paul Maria from the priest's sacristy to find the little procession drawn regularly up. It was to be

photographed for ever on his mind : the evening gloom ; the black intent faces ; the two tall lights ; little Isaac with tears in his eyes. . . . They entered the church while the congregation were singing the last verse of the hymn, and as he entered Dick swept the place with one glance—and looked away.

The place was packed, and not packed in the sense in which the word might be used in Europe or America. African simplicity knew better than that. All chairs and forms had been removed to make more room. The aisles had disappeared. The chancel was carpeted with seated children through whom a lane had been cleared in order that he might reach the altar. On its two lowest steps were children also, and the host of tiny heads were all turned towards him, the whites of their eyes gleaming from their pathetic black faces in the candle-light. They knew that something strange and unusual was toward. The church behind was full as for the Midnight Mass, or for Easter, without the joy.

Dick genuflected and knelt. Then he rose, genuflected again, and went up to the altar. Peter commenced *O Salutaris Hostia*, and that vast congregation took it up as one man. At the Litany of Our Lady, Dick became aware that Peter had been particular that night to arrange for its singing in a manner that he knew the priest desired. The music, an old Florentine chant sent them from Italy, fitted beautifully the soft Sesuto, and, after the opening, it was sung verse and verse about, first by the men, then by the women, and then by the children. But all joined in the repeated *Ora pro nobis*. . . .

At long last, as it seemed to Dick, he was called upon again.

R. *Panem de coelo praestitisti eis*

V. *Omne delectamentum in se habentem.*

Oremus. . . .

Dick's voice faltered a little when he commenced to intone the last collect for the last time. Incredible what a man may think in so short a space while his outer personality, as it were, is set upon some familiar and almost automatic action! Bethlehem: he could all but see the straw-littered stable, the lowing beasts, the tiny child. What had it been? What had been there? Calvary: the white strained dying figure outlined itself before his eyes against the lowering sky. How easy to believe! How hard to doubt! But—but— Ah, this was no moment to rehearse the terrible indictment! He had made his decision. He *knew* he would make no other. He would not see the Bishop again. This heavy gold-embroidered vestment—he wore it for the last time. What had the Bishop said? "All but audibly and visibly . . ." Oh, for it to be over, for relief!

"Amen."

The moment had come.

V

From the back of the church Sister Monica saw it all. She saw that curiously impersonal figure, veiled in gold and glittering stones, so far away, rise, genuflect, and go to the altar. All things hushed themselves for a moment while it bent forward as if hesitating to touch so holy a shrine of the Majesty of God. Then the bell rang, and as if stricken by a mighty wind that great congregation swayed forward and crouched prostrate. The host of little children bent in unison, conscious of the atmosphere of awe, some tiny faces peeping out at parents or friends below, the whites of their eyes visible to her. In a mist, the muffled figure turned, gestured with that it held, to right, to left; up and down; while the bell rang and rang and the incense rose in a cloud. Then it slowly turned again, and itself sank in worship. In the glow of

light from the altar, it rose once more, stood there active for awhile, genuflected at length and descended with slow sure steps. She could see the set white face, the eyes cast down, the clasped hands of the priest.

And a little later she was at the church door, again at the back of the crowd. It was late dusk, with the stars appearing. The great trees of the presbytery garden loomed, vast and towering, against the faint afterglow in the sky. You could see no grass at all, only that great crowd, kneeling again instinctively, but no longer silent. Far away a black figure was pushing its way through to where, in the road, two boys stood holding a horse. Whether he was speaking or not, she could not say: the crying and moaning of the folk about her was too loud. But she could see that they were kissing his hands, holding his coat, detaining him, so that he seemed to have to struggle forward. Some of them held up little children: she could see he blessed them. It looked as if he would be overwhelmed by that vast sea which billowed about him, pulled down by those upraised outstretched arms, and indeed now and again he was completely hidden. He seemed to be reeling, as it were, now in sight, now almost down. And so slow it all was. Fortunately it did not matter that the tears streamed down her face. Dear God, if only their will might prevail!

Out of the swarming people he appeared suddenly on his horse. A roar of cries went up. "*Morena! Ntate! Lumela, morena!*"* He gestured with his right hand once or twice: it was outlined against the white gate. Then—then she sank down herself and there drummed in her ears the sound of hoofs on the hard road.

* "Master! Father! Good-bye, master!"

CHAPTER III

Of a Loggia in the Italian Style

I

RATHER more than a year later, Mr. Aubrey Linscott had his difference of opinion with the authorities at Victoria Station. Driving down Victoria Street from one of his rare business excursions to the City, he looked at his watch and found it seven minutes to four. Characteristically, when the machine had pulled up in the station, he got out, approached the taxi-cab driver, and looked at it again. "Five minutes to four," he said with satisfaction. "My train leaves at five past. Capital, my man. What's the damage?"

The taxi-man peered into the depths at his old-fashioned taximeter and announced the total. Aubrey paid him generously, and the bell rang as the handle was pulled down. "Good-day," said Aubrey genially. "Good-day, sir," said the taxi-man.

Unimportuned, seeing that he had no luggage, Aubrey proceeded to the train-indicator with the suggestion that in so doing he was conferring a favour on the world, an attitude his friends not infrequently perceived in him. There was no real point in his scrutiny of the indicator because he knew exactly what it would indicate, but that again was Aubrey. Unconsciously, he liked to make certain at all points that the world was functioning as it should. And sure enough the non-stop to East Croydon, Broad Chalke, Hordle and the rest, was announced to leave Number 8 at four-five. Aubrey strolled towards Number Eight. At the bookstall he bought an evening paper and glanced briefly over the books—not more than a couple of minutes' delay, anyhow. At Number Eight he presented his ticket. "Too late, sir," said the inspector.

"What! Rubbish. It was five to four as I got out of my taxi, and she leaves at four-five."

"Sorry, sir. Watch wrong, I suppose. She left punctual. It's eight past."

Aubrey's world fell in ruins. "Impossible. I've never known my watch wrong. It was certainly right this morning. I noticed Broad Chalke station clock."

The inspector intercepted a lady and clipped her ticket for the four-ten on Number Nine. "Look sharp, mum. You've run it close. . . . Then Broad Chalke was wrong, sir. I shouldn't wonder neither. Broad Chalke!"

Aubrey was inclined to argue. "Nonsense. Broad Chalke is my station, and an excellent one in its way. It's not our fault that the service is so poor." Then, the inspector not appearing interested, he asked the inevitable question. "When's the next?"

"Five o'clock. . . . Excuse me, sir."

"But that's slow," retorted Aubrey. "Five forty-five is the next decent train."

The man shot Aubrey a look, but otherwise ignored him. A lady with an umbrella, several parcels, and a couple of children, poked him in the back. He became aware that he was in the way of belated Number Nine's. He backed out, and reflected dismally. More than an hour and a half! Just like this infernal railway. What the devil could a man do at Victoria in an hour and a half! Tea? Possibly, but an hour and a half! He looked at his watch again, and at the previously neglected station clock. Ten minutes slow, sure enough. Well, he didn't believe it. Good idea—he'd just stroll up to Westminster and back. And if the station clock was wrong by Big Ben . . .

Of course Aubrey did not believe that the station clock was wrong, but then, on the other hand, how could *he* be? He passed out ruminating. True, he had only

had this watch two months, seeing that he had magnanimously presented his old one to a favourite nephew on the occasion of his going up to Cambridge, but the shopman had assured him of its reliability and he had paid a big price. Besides, it *had* kept excellent time up to now. It was really most extraordinary. He pulled it out again for another look.

By that time he was before the Stores and, again as usual, indifferent to the traffic. Consequently he succeeded in stopping abruptly in the path of a reverend gentleman just then descending the steps, and that hurriedly. There was a slight collision and a mutual and instantaneous recognition. Said Aubrey: "Damn! Hullo, Haynes!" Said the Reverend Gerald Haynes: "I beg your— Why, hullo, Linscott!"

Aubrey held out his hand. "Glad to see you," he said, "very glad to see you, Haynes. I had an idea I might drop in to see you. I've an hour and a half, by a most extraordinary affair. My watch was right this morning, but when I got to Victoria for the four-five——"

"My dear fellow," interjected Haynes, taking his arm, "you must excuse me. I'm in a hurry. I've to say Evensong at half-past. Come on. Then we'll have a cup of tea. You've plenty of time for both."

Aubrey allowed himself to be hurried on, but he was not so easily turned from his grievance. "All right. That sounds delightful. But, dash it all, I've had this watch two months and it has kept perfect time till to-day. Besides, I've the greatest faith in our watchmaker at Broad Chalke. For a small place, he's an excellent person—excellent."

"Another case of faith without good works being insufficient for salvation," retorted the cleric. "But if you come to Evensong, perhaps that will help to even matters."

"That's all very well," grumbled Aubrey.

"Of course it is. Excellent. I haven't seen you for ages. And seeing you only come to Town once in a blue moon, and that plainly you had no original intention of calling upon me, I bless your Protestant watchmaker. How goes things?"

"My dear Haynes, Harker's Orchard remains the marvel I thought it when I bought. No; still the wonder grows. I'm happier than I've ever been in my life. And just now you should see my roses. Why not run down some Saturday?"

"Saturday! The last day for a parson! Some Monday possibly. How do you get there?"

Thus desultorily chatting the two friends passed from Westminster's magnificence to its slums. Taxis and omnibuses were left behind and costers' barrows took their place. The buildings ceased to aspire towards heaven and became obviously concerned chiefly with the affairs of the dirty streets of earth. The passers-by no longer moved with the activity and conscious importance of the folk in Victoria Street, but slowly drifted about with the purposelessness of the unemployed or the inquisitive dawdle of the poor, who cannot afford to miss a bargain or an excitement. Shortly warehouses loomed up, and though the streets widened, the dirt thickened. Finally, at the gate of a brick church that had an air of being much better to do than the buildings about it, the two men paused. "Here we are," said Haynes. "Go in, will you? And come round to the vestry afterwards."

Aubrey nodded and entered. He was familiar with his surroundings and made his way up the centre aisle to a seat some three or four rows from the sanctuary. Half a dozen people were scattered about. He bowed to the altar, and seated himself as a bell commenced to ring rapidly for perhaps a minute. A little later Haynes came in.

Father Haynes proceeded to his stall and to Evensong

in that manner for which the Church of the Transfiguration is famous. It is no exaggeration to say so. His very surplice was distinctive. At the Transfiguration cottas were an abhorrence and the usual Anglican surplice a byword. The surplices of the Transfiguration were full and dignified and in some remote way descended, like all else there, from Sarum. The clergy rarely appeared to wear stoles; and their black scarves they wore, with their cassocks, in the streets when engaged on parochial business. They likewise wore "priests' caps." In the building itself their behaviour proclaimed to the wise that they were neither Roman Catholic priests nor Anglican clergymen. But it is hard to say, why. Perhaps they were neither business-like on the one hand nor sanctimonious on the other. They were, instead, rather gravely genial, if one may be forgiven the word. They wished to convey that while they were not remote Levites, they were not, either, democratic evangelists. And they usually had a big congregation.

The congregation was not, however, drawn from the Parish, or rarely so. It came from all over London. People came whose devotion was sensibly increased by the sight of the great altar draped with unecclesiastical-looking materials, the two big candles, the small plain cross and the four angels on four pillars who held up four candles all round about. Musical people came who liked the perfection of the Transfiguration's peculiar (Sarum) form of plainsong. Staunch followers came who liked to hear and see the Litany, precisely as it is set out in the Book of Common Prayer, sung in procession before the Solemn Eucharist. Characteristically the attendants in the sanctuary were always either grown men or very small boys. And the sermons when preached were always sermons. There were neither "panegyrics" nor "talks" at the Transfiguration.

Aubrey listened to Evensong and enjoyed it thoroughly. Two big lights stood in the chancel. His friend, in a kindly but impersonal way, read the opening Sentence and the Exhortation. Then, in a reverent and devout murmur, came the General Confession. The Absolution was a return to the tone of the Exhortation—a tone suggesting that it was not properly an absolution at all—the Lord's Prayer to that of the General Confession. Then there was a slight but perceptible pause. And suddenly Father Haynes seriously addressed himself to Evensong with the versicle :

O Lord, open Thou our lips.

Fifteen minutes later Linscott joined him in the Vestry. The other, in his cassock, led the way down a passage, through a door, into a hall (where he stopped a moment by the letter-rack which had spaces for six priests' correspondence), and up some stairs. At the first floor he threw open a door and bade his friend enter. Aubrey selected an easy-chair whose back was turned to the empty grate. Haynes tossed his letters on to a desk, rang a bell, placed a small table between them and pulled up another easy-chair. "Well, by my watch," he said good-humouredly, "you still have the best part of an hour all told. Plenty of time for tea. Ah, come in, John."

A manservant entered with a tea tray. Aubrey noticed cucumber and lettuce sandwiches with relish. It had been a hot day. Also hot buttered buns, that follow so excellently. "I'm glad I came, Haynes," he said. "'Grass and oils.'"

"Ever greedy," laughed the priest. "John, the hot water. . . . Well, and now tell me of Harker's Orchard."

Over the tea Aubrey retold him in detail of his sensational "find" a little less than a year ago, and at some length reiterated the beauties and delights of it. Both

in the middle thirties, the two friends had never drifted far from the relationship the University had established between them, for they had been together at King's. There they had had much in common, for both had come up with the intention of taking Holy Orders. Possibly Haynes had remained faithful to that intention because it had largely been financially necessary for him to remain faithful to some choice or another, and possibly Linscott had done the reverse for exactly the opposite reason. At any rate when Haynes went to Wells, Linscott proceeded leisurely through Europe, and in Port Said had been attracted by the notion of visiting East and South Africa on his way home. Relatives had vaguely conveyed the idea to him that he "might do something" in either East Africa or Natal, and he had played with the notion as a young man would. But the principal aggressor, his one-time guardian, having died, and Aubrey himself having returned home, it became obvious that he should take a flat in London. Perhaps fortunately, the Great European War shortly took a hand in the matter, doing even more, for it reunited the two friends who had been in danger of drifting apart. Aubrey had been having his hair cut in a barber's shop in Le Havre when, in the glass, he perceived a stranger enter. It was Haynes, in a padre's uniform, and the next few months renewed all the old friendship, for Aubrey was definitely unfit for the Front as a result of an earlier trench-fever. And, all being finally over, they had returned, in a manner of speaking, together.

Curiously, the War had had fundamentally the same and yet apparently different result in both their lives. Aubrey had definitely and more decisively than anything he had yet done in his life, abandoned London. He had sought and most unexpectedly found, Harker's Orchard. Haynes, however, had declined to return to his country.

parish and had found a place instead on the staff of the Transfiguration. And both for the same object. France and Belgium, 1914-1918, had deepened the religious feeling of them both.

Thus, not unnaturally, when the lighting of Aubrey's pipe gave him a chance to comment, Haynes said: "And you have found God, as you hoped, in your garden, eh, Aubrey?"

II

Aubrey finished lighting his pipe and then leant back comfortably in his chair. Probably an onlooker would not have thought of this man as one likely to be even interested in such a question; but he was. Short, wearing glasses, rotund and ruddy, distinctly "comfortable" in clothes that suggested that he lived in the country (although, down there, he habitually spoke of them as his London suit), he did not look the kind of person who should be much concerned with so vital and tremendous a quest as that of God. Yet, in a real sense, he was.

He nodded now. "I think so, Gerald," he said. "The peace and beauty of it all are growing on me. In the early morning—I'm nearly always out with the dawn—you have no idea how near heaven one feels in the garden."

"I ought to know. I had one for years."

"Perhaps you were never up with the dawn," said Aubrey, shrewdly.

Haynes smiled. "Maybe not, Aubrey, in those days. *Touché*. But still——"

"Then you never really noticed the thrushes on the lawn or the dew on the roses or the utter loveliness there is even in a cabbage."

Haynes settled himself more firmly in his chair. He

loved an argument, especially of this sort. "I did not, I admit. The last anyway. But I believe, in the first place, that a great deal of that is sheer imagination. The rest is mere sentiment."

His tone slightly irritated Aubrey. He liked Haynes, but he felt that he was often the superior, and frequently the priestly superior, person. So he replied emphatically. "And I think Benson was right in *The Light Invisible*. You remember how we read it at King's? Nature is the robe of God."

"Benson himself disliked that book when he got down to hard tacks."

"You mean when he became a Roman and had to forget that side of religion," retorted Linscott.

"No. I don't. No Catholic, not even a Roman, has to forget 'that side of religion.' But if God is manifest in Nature, He is supremely manifest in Human Nature. He designed the Garden of Eden, but only as a setting for Adam."

"Possibly. But for Adam before the Fall. Surely, when you walk through your parish, you see more of the Devil than of God?"

"I don't, Aubrey. You're wrong there. The more I see of our people, pluckily fighting poverty, cheerfully facing the ghastliest things—unemployment, undernourishment, even death—the more I admire them. Even those outside the Church. There is the image of God."

Aubrey puffed thoughtfully. "There may be something in all that, Gerald," he said at last, half ashamed at himself, "but I can't see it myself. In the War, you remember, you always saw heroism and splendour. I didn't. I saw filth and ugliness and a lot of beastly graft and grab. Those camps at Havre! Good God!"

Haynes stirred in his chair, excitedly for a heavy,

rather phlegmatic man. "Yes. It was in those camps at Havre that I saw how fine human nature could be—and for one reason only: the Divine in it."

"Odd that we should see things so differently," replied the other. "Why?"

Haynes studied him smilingly. "There's no *soul* in all the beauty of nature," he said.

His friend considered the statement for a moment while a dray rumbled by in the street beneath the open window, its noise seeming to fill the room. He took his pipe from his mouth to reply and studied the bowl. "Perhaps not," he said slowly; "I suppose certainly not. But nature *is* a mirror of God. It seems to me, too, that God is more directly concerned with the production of beauty than of happiness or goodness. You can see beauty in the tiniest flower or insect, in snow crystals, in a sunset, in the Weald as a whole from my window. God makes all that. He doesn't make your people plucky or religious, directly. That's their own job, and nine-tenths of the humans I know aren't plucky or religious, and don't want to be. They fight or they squeal as do rats in a trap. I don't see God in them: I see the Devil."

"But when you see grace at work in them, you see God's handiwork as you never see it in plants or insects, don't you, Aubrey?"

"Maybe. I suppose that side of it is thrust under your nose."

"Sure. And it's the finer because it's of the soul. It's more wonderful that through prayer and the sacraments God should be able to make some drunken brute into a Christian, than that the forces of Nature which He released should create a primrose in the woods. Your plants and animals can only exhibit beauty, but our people can exhibit that and moral loveliness

besides. I've never regretted that I left the country, Aubrey."

"But, my dear Gerald, cannot you see all that in the country, too?"

"You should be able to. But you don't. Not so often. I don't quite know why, but you don't. The easier life is, and the more beautiful, the less man seems to want God. The less, then, He uses the means of grace. And the less He exhibits God's handiwork."

"In that case," remarked his friend, "how odd to have commenced with the environment of a Garden! According to you God should have known that that was the worst place possible to call out the best in man!"

Haynes bristled a little. The layman, though a friend, was attacking the professional. "My dear fellow," he said, "you entirely miss the point. Adam in the Garden before the Fall was a more perfect image of God than even a saint in a slum. God doesn't *like* filth and struggle and sinful environment. Therefore He never willed it for man. He wanted him to have beauty about him, and He wanted him to enjoy it and see Him in it. But now even your country-side is not perfect: it brings forth thistles and thorns. In it, man is as imperfect as his brother in the slum; but Redemption has intervened. Ever since, in an earth under the curse and in fallen man, God is most manifest where the fight is hottest and grace most triumphant."

Haynes got up and crossed to the bookshelf. He had the air of a victor. "Listen to this," he said.

Aubrey waved his pipe at him. "Don't read it," he cried. "Tell me something much more interesting. Why are those same curséd thorns and thistles just as beautiful as violets and primroses? And had Adam roses? If so, had the roses, thorns?"

Haynes paused by his books, with a trifle of irritation. "Really, Aubrey," he began.

His friend blew out triumphant smoke. "The fact is, old man, that although I'm a Catholic as much as you are, I'm not quite so bound by the old theology. I stick to the Creed, of course. But the Garden of Eden is a fable, and doesn't bear strict analysis. It illustrates a truth, not every truth. I decline to part with my thorns and thistles."

"And with your stinging nettles and dock-leaves?"

"Sure. Dock-leaves are beautiful things. Ever seen a nettle's sting under the microscope?"

Haynes came back to his chair. He sat down again, and laughed. But there was a trifle of irritation in his laugh. "You're becoming a confounded sentimentalist," he said. "You'll have to look out, Aubrey. That's one of the ill-effects of the country. It's morally relaxing. Come and stay here for a fortnight: it'll do you all the good in the world."

His words aroused his friend. "If I don't look out," he exclaimed, "I shall have to stay the night! I must go."

The other glanced at his watch. "When's the next?" he asked.

"Too late to drive home by daylight, and too late for my dinner. See me to the station."

"I can't. I've got to prepare——"

"Rubbish. Come on. Or I shan't come again. That's the worst of the City. It's morally relaxing. You forget the good God gave you legs. Besides, you've to arrange to come down, and we haven't time to discuss it now. We can fix a date as we walk. Come on."

Haynes got up and reached for his hat. "All right," he said. "As far as Victoria Street. If I don't, I suppose I shan't see you again for a twelvemonth."

They descended to the hall and passed out this time by the front door of the presbytery. It gave upon a grimy flagged court, quite empty and railed off from the street. Haynes opened the iron gate. Linscott passed through and paused on the pavement while his friend latched the gate. Then, as they set off together: "Why in the world don't you grow something there?" he demanded, almost querulously. "That yard would depress me every time I went in or out."

Haynes strode imperturbably by his side and did not reply verbally. But he shot him a quizzical look.

"Well," continued Aubrey, "and why not? Is there anything so very startling in the suggestion? This street is about as ugly as anything in London and yet the one house that ought to try to liven it up hasn't a patch of garden. You might at least have a few geraniums in pots!"

"My dear fellow," said Haynes, "most emphatically you ought to come to us for a fortnight. . . . When you had your flat in St. James's Street, did you notice the absence of a garden? We are too busy for such things. Cartaret suggested a shrine of the Blessed Virgin or a crucifix, but the Vicar turned him down. Cartaret is nearly as sentimental as you are. He wanted a 'loggia' in the Italian style!"

"Well," persisted Aubrey, "and why not? Anything in any style would be better than that."

"I don't think so. A loggia in the Italian style would mark the church as exotic. Passers-by would think us Romans or cranks. And the money that would be wasted could much more wisely be used on other things."

"In short, the loggia might be sold and given to the poor."

They turned the corner and Haynes smiled. "Aubrey, Aubrey," he cried, "this is too much! Seriously, old



man, you must look to it. When a sentimentalist begins to quote Scripture with a perversity of which he is fully conscious in his own mind, there is something wrong. If the God you have found in your garden only moves you to the production of gardens, do you not think you have possibly mistaken His identity?"

"But if the God you find in human nature makes you neglect a garden, why should not I make much the same enquiry, my friend?"

Haynes took his arm. "Isn't this becoming rather a foolish wrangle?" he asked, as one who had no doubt in his own mind as to the answer. "I've got to turn back at Victoria Street. Let's discuss the possibility of my coming down, as you said."

But Linscott was not so easily pacified. Buried in the little man there was an odd streak of obstinacy and, once that was reached, he would show unexpected determination in following it up. Thus, now, his mind was really running upon the same trail as he demanded: "Why must you turn back at Victoria Street?"

Haynes replied as one would humour a child. "I'm in my cassock," he explained. "Victoria Street is out of the parish. We don't go out of the parish in a cassock."

"That's no reason," retorted Aubrey.

"It's a most excellent reason," rejoined Haynes.

"In the first place, it's the tradition of the Transfiguration. In the second, it's the order of the Vicar. In the third, it is profoundly reasonable. As I have already said, we do not wish to be taken for cranks or Romans."

They passed the length of one dingy street without further words. At length Haynes broke the silence.

"Look here," he said, "what's to-day? Thursday, isn't it? Suppose I run down Monday. Could you put me up for the night?"

Aubrey's ill-humour vanished. "Delighted," he said. "It would be the greatest pleasure. Do come. There's a good train at eleven-five: get out at Hordle. I'll meet you and we'll be in excellent time for lunch. It's a bit further than Broad Chalke, but I'll have the car and run you round by the prettier way."

"Eleven-five to Hordle. That'll do excellently. Well, it's been awfully jolly seeing you."

Victoria Street flowed by them. They shook hands. Aubrey peered over his glasses. "But, look here, that cassock business, it's all *wrong*. It's all muddled. *You* can't get out of uniform, not out of God's uniform, that is. And what's the tradition——"

Haynes interrupted with a tolerant smile. "We'll discuss that, and anything else you please, on Monday," he said. "Meanwhile, you don't want to miss your train. Good-bye."

"No. That's right. See you Monday then. Cheerio." And with a wave of his hand Aubrey turned, preoccupied, into the traffic. Haynes watched him out of sight with a slight frown on his face. He noticed that sheer Providence appeared to guide his departing friend, who, walking fast and seeing nobody, nevertheless avoided all collision. The frown changed to a smile, but the smile was arrested as he turned on his heel.

A newspaper boy came down the street, shouting the latest edition. There was a comparative dearth of news and the urchin contented himself with bawling "Evenin' Paiper" at intervals. But something had had to be printed for the placard, and the proprietors of the sheet fished for pence with the bold headlines:

THE CAREW DIVORCE.

LADY ANN CORNERED.

Haynes felt in his cassock pocket, and gestured

to the newsboy. Having obtained his paper, he turned away, glancing at it. He had temporarily forgotten the tradition of the Transfiguration. Lord Carew was a member of the congregation, and in fact one of Hayne's own (irregular) penitents.

III

Meanwhile Aubrey proceeded to the station and caught his train. He was now in no mood to argue with the inspector or with anybody else, but rather stowed himself away in a corner of his first-class carriage and gave great thanks when the train started without any other passenger having invaded his privacy. He was safe as far as East Croydon, and it was extremely unlikely that he would be bothered beyond.

He looked out reflectively on the hideousness of the crowded squalid houses once they had crossed the Thames. Now and again a street opened up, a canyon of heat and dirt, with slatternly women and quarrelling children on every doorstep at this hour. Or now they were passing garden on garden running down to the railroad, gardens wherein, for the most part, no attempt was made at gardening. Rather they were given up to clothes-lines and rabbit-hutches and chicken-runs, and Aubrey noted grimly that the majority had erected wire-less aerials which carried a network of ugliness even into the air. They rattled by suburban stations which, in this mood, moved him to an even worse sense of horror. The staring advertisements, the grim utility of everything, the sense that neither builders nor users cared for anything except the sheerly practical, all weighed on Aubrey's soul. Even the parks they glimpsed suggested the same thing. They were not there because of the beauty of grass and trees and shrubs : indeed, the public with its waste-paper and hideous clothes and ungainly

perambulators, and the authorities with their dreadful benches and stiff walks and waste-paper baskets and stark iron notices and railings, did their united best to spoil that beauty. No, they were there because it was convenient for children to have a place to play in, in order that they might grow up stronger for labour, and for the public health, that as many people as possible should be able to crowd together as thickly as possible, as near as possible to their daily work. The whole world about was stamped with that same dreadful aim : Utility, since utility made for wealth. And wealth, reflected Aubrey, seldom made for happiness, since the great majority did not get enough, and, of those who did, a still larger majority did not know how to enjoy it.

But the little man was not Pharisaical or priggish as he sat huddled up there thinking so. He was honestly turning over in his mind the conversation, and the implication of the conversation, that he had had with his friend. He was quite sure that God was the Author of Beauty and that Satan was responsible for ugliness (ultimately), and he was too simple and too orthodox to be much worried with the query as to who was the Author of Satan. Nor did it strike him that the God he should have seen in Nature was not the God his theology taught him to expect to see. But for all that he was worrying over a series of questions in his own mind which might one day lead him into the great depths.

First there was the matter of the dock-leaves. He had instantly alleged that dock-leaves were beautiful, dock-leaves and stinging nettles. But were they? And if they were, and indeed he thought they were, was there anything at all ugly in Nature? He began to worry that out. Take animals, thought Aubrey. A racehorse—glorious; but, well, the land-crabs he had once seen in Zanzibar—ugh! They were more than ugly, Aubrey.

thought. They had given him the "creeps," ugly brutes with staring hideous eyes and great pincers, living in mud on garbage and devouring each other if they got a chance. Like the night-mare of the end of the world in *The Time Machine*. Or—or Birds of Paradise, yes; but vultures? Cats, yes, lions too; but monkeys, especially some monkeys one saw at the Zoo, with gaudy, hideous, revolting back-sides, monkeys whose cages one did not care to approach with one's lady friends. And was, say, a hippopotamus beautiful? Aubrey was disposed to say "Yes," but dubiously. He knew he was fond of animals. . . .

Or take human beings. Men in a Turkish bath. . . . Fat, lolling stomachs, bald heads, podgy legs. What would women in a Turkish bath be like? He remembered a doctor in the War who had maintained that men were much more beautiful than women. Perhaps. He really didn't know. . . .

Well, go back to vegetables. He had recently read a book by a Bishop on the subject. Down at Harker's Orchard, under the trees. He had enthusiastically agreed, but—come to think, well . . . The fellow had said that beauty of form depended on arrangement of parts, and that only few arrangements out of many thousand possibilities could be called beautiful. Nevertheless, Nature, it had been asserted, invariably selects beautiful combinations, as in the leaves of plants. But did she? Aubrey asked himself. Leaves, for example, were of all shapes and irregularities and differences. Cacti and the night-blooming Sirius, coco-nut palms and—and dock-leaves: well, in a way, they were all beautiful. Especially taken *en masse*. But could one imagine an ugly leaf? Suppose that any combination would strike someone as beautiful? Yes, and he recalled that even in Harker's Orchard he had jibbed a bit at one passage. The pious prelate had declared that even the

irregular heaping together of fragments to form a mountain slope was "inevitably beautiful." Which was absurd. Heaped anyhow with a few tons added anywhere or taken away, you might still declare the mass beautiful. In that frame of mind it would be impossible to help making a beautiful mountain-slope.

Aubrey reflected that it was a big question. After all, the Philosophers differed. Socrates, if he remembered rightly, had maintained the relativity of beauty, but Plato that it was absolute. Of moderns, Kant had denied its objective reality, but then Kant! Ruskin entered his mind with relief. He, at any rate, had found beauty spiritual and typical of Divine attributes. Aubrey guessed that Ruskin was good enough for him. The poets, too,—Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth. The fact was it was muddled minds that did not see natural beauty. Haynes, for example—good enough chap, but too theological, too damned conservative. *Set.* And the poor folk of the ugly stations and houses, well, they had too much to do getting their bread and butter to think about it at all. And when they did have an afternoon's leisure, their thinking apparatus was too muddled. It ran to games. . . . Rules. . . . People had to have rules as a train rails. . . . Ah! "East Croydon. E-e-east Croy-don!"

The train slowed and stopped, and Aubrey rose hastily to cross the compartment. He knew that if you leaned from the window of a first-class compartment, the average first-class passenger read the sign aright and passed on seeking further. But even as he reached it, his meditation was broken off and his seclusion violated. In fact he had some difficulty in regaining his own seat in such a way that no suspicion should attach to his motive in leaving it.

A lady entered. Aubrey opened his paper. A con-

versation between the lady and her porter reached his ears and even his understanding. He half lowered his paper: it was a subject in which Aubrey was vastly interested.

"This'll do, mum," said the porter. "This be the fast from Victoria. Broad Chalke next stop, mum."

"Thank you," said the lady, seating herself as the porter put a suit-case on the seat opposite and accepted a gratuity.

"Thank yer, mum," replied the porter, retreating slowly and standing by the open door. He surveyed the platform leisurely, his hand on the door-handle. "Yes'm. There's a good many makes that mistake. The four-five and the five-forty-five from Victoria be the fast trains. Four-thirty Charing Cross and five o'clock Victoria's slow. They goes on too, slow all the way. Ulcombe, Pett Down, Hillmarton, Little Barling, Pentridge, Broad Chalke and Horden."

"I didn't mind waiting the half-hour so much, but I hope my friends will have waited at Broad Chalke."

"Sure to 'ave, mum. They'll guess wot you done."

The porter shut the door firmly, and stepped back. The whistle blew. Despite his pleasant explanation, he obviously wiped the lady from his mental slate and faded away in the traffic of the platform. The train moved more rapidly. The lady glanced about her and perceived Aubrey.

Now a conversation on the subject of the service from London to Hordle was one that Aubrey never missed. The chance of it was enough to banish all reticence from his manner and all peace from his soul. The fact that he was rarely caught himself only served to increase his zeal. He enjoyed explaining, especially to victims, what they should have done and how monstrous it was of the Company to make their mistakes possible.

"You were caught with that slow train, I gather," he commenced.

The lady smiled. There was something in her smile that moved Aubrey pleasantly, and he smiled back at her. Sympathy established, she spoke, in a singularly pleasant tone. "Yes, I was. And please don't say another word about it. I can see that you have before now been caught and I rather gather that you are about to explain the whole mystery to me. But please don't. That porter has been doing it for a half an hour. I have now not the remotest notion which train I should have caught, nor where, nor why. And I don't want to know. It seems to me I have been travelling for hours and that I must have gone round London several times."

"You have, practically," said Aubrey.

"The amazing thing is that places exist of which one never hears at all. Norbury, for instance. What is Norbury? Who lives there? Why have I never heard of Norbury?"

"You cannot be a student of pre-war fiction," replied Aubrey. "You would otherwise know that Mr. G. K. Chesterton is fond of Norbury and that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle placed strange happenings there. It's a desperate place to have anything to do with."

"I should think so. It looked so fearfully respectable. Like a disguised criminal."

"Exactly. And I should imagine that its inhabitants are of those who fill our prisons or our lunatic asylums. Which makes it the more criminal that the Railway Company, accepting an honest man's money in exchange for a ticket to Broad Chalke, should stop at Norbury at all."

"Anyway, I'm right for Broad Chalke now?"

Aubrey glanced from the window and observed Pett Down. "You are," he said. "That's Pett Down, and the top of it hasn't changed so much since I was a

boy and caught newts in a pond up there. The road goes on till it comes to Latimer Hill. We used to coast down into Gadshunt. It's heavenly country still."

"Is it? I'm from East Anglia and the Midlands myself."

"Cambridge way?"

"Nearer Bedford. But I know all the Cambridgeshire country."

"It's very lovely there," reflected Aubrey. "I was at Cambridge, you know, and the evenings over the fens— Did a good deal of bicycling, when I got the time. There's something fascinating in all that low country, with the tower of Ely far off over the flats."

"Yes. Oh, but it's good to be home again."

At that Aubrey studied her a little more closely. She was looking out of her window; possibly she did not want to continue the conversation. He could not exactly say from her manner. So he allowed his eyes to rest upon her briefly, the while he decided whether his next remark should be in the nature of a closure or an opening. Meantime they passed Little Barling.

She was young, but it was difficult to place her age. She had an air of assurance and perhaps of experience. Blue "Irish" eyes he had already noted. Fair bobbed hair. Simply and very pleasantly dressed. And then he noticed her beads.

That carried the day with Aubrey, as such things had the habit of doing. They were of coloured wood, very simple and really beautiful. Aubrey honestly loved simple things that were beautiful. She wore them with a brown frock that set them off. "You've been abroad?" he queried.

"Yes. I reached London on Monday—for three unpleasant days. I want the English country more than I can say. I've been away so long. We wintered in

Egypt, but we stayed much too late. Cairo was fearful. Oh, I'm glad to be back!"

"It's more than ten years since I was in Egypt—ten; fifteen! Good Lord, how the time flies! I suppose you duly visited Tutankhamen?"

"No. Not the tomb. His relics, though, in the Museum." She paused a moment and then spoke impulsively. "I hate Egypt."

Something in her tone caught Aubrey's attention. He guessed she hated Egypt for reasons not wholly Egyptian. But he was far too polite to enquire, of course. He merely agreed with her.

"So did I. Have you been to Greece? That's beautiful."

"Is it?" She turned, interested. "I was told so the other day by a woman whose opinion I value. She had been there recently."

"Egypt," said Aubrey, deliberately didactic, "is theatrical, megalomaniac, ugly and crude. You might almost say devilish. Greece is the home of the gods and of men. It doesn't matter that the house is in ruins; the memory lingers. It's all flowers and open turf and wild mountains."

"And Egypt is all filthy guides and donkey-boys and sand. At the Sphinx there were a dozen cameras pointed ready to take your portrait on its knees. And fruit stalls, and a tent to change into Arab dress, and camels to sit on for photographs again. For a sovereign you could even be led a hundred yards into the desert."

He laughed. "As bad as all that?"

"Infinitely worse. Besides now Palestine is thrown in. You can do it from Cairo in about three days. While the liner waits. All the Americans were either going, or explaining how easily they had gone. I should think you could now go 'round the world' in about a week less."

Aubrey was increasingly interested in her. "I know," he said sympathetically. "And you hate that, as I do?"

"Hate it? No, I don't hate it. I could even do it with the right person. But I shouldn't persuade myself that I'd seen either Egypt or Palestine."

Aubrey liked her the more for not conventionally agreeing with him. They passed another station. "Pentridge," he said. "We go into a bad tunnel in a moment. I used to go up that road to shoot on the Rifle Range over the tunnel when I was a boy. Heavens, what afternoons we had! It was all wild country, where one could find lizards and snakes, and nuts and wild strawberries, and we nearly always came within a minute of missing the train and had to run down that hill with our heavy rifles, like mad men. Good days, though. Yellow cake and tea we used to have when we'd finished shooting; never tasted so good since! May I put up your window?"

The train whistled and entered the tunnel. Neither could speak in the roar of it. Aubrey leaned back, and saw visions of a schoolboy on the turf overhead. He found himself wondering at the odd thing that schoolboy had turned out—of Cambridge, of his visit to Egypt on his road to South Africa, of the War, of the girl in the train. He wondered idly where she was going. And they emerged at last into the sunlight.

"It's a long tunnel," she said.

"It is." He crossed over and let down her window. "And there's Broad Chalke. See the church? I like that squat tower. That's the Chalk Pit, my side. Oh, I'm glad to be back again, though I've only been in Town a day!"

"You live here?"

"Yes. I've a perfectly exquisite place—Harker's Orchard. Don't you think the name's lovely? It's not

really in Broad Chalke, though. Some miles out. On the border of three counties—Surrey, Sussex and Kent.”

The train was obviously slowing, but he became aware that the girl was staring at him intently.

“Harker’s Orchard ?” she queried.

“Yes. Why ?”

The train was already nearly at a standstill, and it was all over in a few seconds. But there occurred one of those peculiar tense moments that one remembers for a lifetime. She had got up, and he noticed that she was tall for a woman, and finely made. Her eyes, alert, aristocratic, regarded him curiously. He could not make out the expression. Then : “I suppose it’s not really so odd a coincidence,” she said, smiling.

“What is ? I say, you must tell me,” he said. All the while the porter was shouting “Broad Chalke !” and they were preparing to get out. “Allow me.” He reached for her suit-case.

“A man on the ship from Port Said to Marseilles talked of ‘Harker’s Orchard’,” she replied, moving to the door. “He knew this part of the country.”

“Really. Who ?”

He had to open the door and hand her out. Maybe she did not hear him, for a woman darted forward almost at once. “Ann,” she cried, “my dear ! How heavenly to see you again !”

Aubrey had perforce put down the suit-case. He could not repeat his request now. He raised his hat and moved away. She saw him going, and broke off her greeting. “Thank you so much,” she said, with a little smile. “Delighted,” he murmured, and found himself exchanging glances with a man who was plainly the husband of the welcoming lady. He knew himself out of it now, and walked away. But, dash it all, he would have liked to know who had talked of Harker’s Orchard.

He descended the long flight of steps that led to the tunnel under the line, turned to the right and emerged into the station yard. The air glowed golden with the evening light. Aubrey, who was rather like a cat in his liking for familiar things, looked round appreciatively. It was all as he had left it in the morning, and, though it would have been absurd to expect otherwise, he was conscious of pleasure and almost of relief. A few cars were lined up in the circle before the station; on the right, after some fencing, the few shops began—the grocer's, the chemist on the corner; on the left, the coal merchant's sign hung out, the impeccable watchmaker lived, and the garage awaited him. In front the street opened up, running down the hill, pretending to be business-like, looking new and yet homely. But trees and fields were not yet held at a distance, and on the crown of the hill rose the oaks and beeches and elms of the common and the open country.

Aubrey made his way to the garage and found his car. George took his shilling and asked if he had enough petrol. Aubrey knew he had, but he took in a couple of gallons just for luck and because he liked to watch the automatic pump. Then he climbed into the little 'bus, shut the door with a bang, and laid his hands on the familiar driving-wheel.

"Good evenin', Mr. Linscott," said George.

"Evenin', George," replied Aubrey. "All clear?"

The man glanced out of the garage door. "All clear, sir," he said.

Aubrey passed slowly out, swinging to the right and then straightening up. He let out the clutch and she began to run downhill on her own. The way was clear and the incline slight: he got into top. She sailed away with her owner completely satisfied.

Down and up. She took the rise into the main road

without a murmur and Aubrey settled more comfortably into his seat. He gave her more gas and quickened up for the steady climb to the cross-roads. Bad cross-roads they were, his own running from Kniveton to Waterhouses and the other from Gadshunt to Yelverstoft, across-country. She would rarely take it on top, because one had to slow down at the crossing. Still, passing that safely, he was momentarily glad to be going slowly as he could thus see with satisfaction, for the hundredth time, the house on his left, thatched, old-fashioned, whose lovely garden ablaze with roses was veritably cut out of the hillside. But as he neared the open common a car behind honked at him.

Aubrey closed to the left. He had to turn off the main road here and take that which ran across the ridge to the glorious view over Pickworth Hill and down to Hordle. Aubrey never took chances, and he wasn't going to swing across to his turn until that car had passed.

So, in the golden evening light with a clear sky above, just on the brow of the hill with the real grass of the country and the flowering gorse about them, the big touring car passed. The hood was down. The man sat next the chauffeur in front, with the two women at the back talking excitedly. But, as they passed, one waved her hand to him and he caught her smile. It was Ann.

The touring car took the road to Waterhouses. It struck him that the man was a Colonel Sinclair, whom he was supposed to know. "Hang it," he said to himself, "I hope the fellow didn't recognise me." Then, at the corner, he caught the radiance of the sunset through a grove of pine-trees, and forgot the incident.

CHAPTER IV

Harker's Orchard

I

AUBREY woke early in his slanting roofed bedroom at Harker's Orchard as he had told Haynes he did, and commenced the cheerful routine of his day. He jumped at once out of bed—rotund, chubby, in pink silk pyjamas, and went over to the window to survey the morning. It was a pleasant dormer window at which he presently stood, wide-open to a prospect that is, indeed, peculiarly English at all times and was so particularly that day. It neither rained nor shone. It was neither bright nor gloomy. It gave no promise of anything at all. And yet Aubrey, standing at the window, muttered to himself: Glory be to God!

For there far away was the skyline, with West Chilham outlined against it to the west and Chippingwold showing plainly to the east, the former easily recognised for its magnificent church tower and the second for its equally magnificent pine-trees. Below his window lay his garden, as was right and proper: first, the lawn, with a bed or two outlined in the turf and a few fruit trees to give shade; secondly, below it, a terrace which was given over to the kitchen garden; and thirdly, below the terrace again, a great bank of hazels through which ran a winding steep path down to another terrace and the tennis-court.

And still, below the tennis-court, the ground fell away, though great elms and oaks hid the property below Aubrey's own. Over their tops he could see the chequer-board of fields, clearly marked towards Hordle, leading into a mass of green and grey to the east where was the Weald of Kent. Down there, then, lay Bridgeford, which was Kent, Chippingwold, which was Sussex,

Yelvertoft, which was Surrey, and the gardens of Harker's Orchard which was Aubrey Linscott. He pulled a spray of climbing white roses towards him and drew their dewy fragrance into his nostrils. And as he did so he perceived Hedge.

Hedge came into view by straightening himself among the strawberry beds over which he had been bending. The fall of the land almost hid the beds, but was not quite enough to hide Hedge when he stood erect. Aubrey dropped his spray of roses and leaned out on tiptoe. There was nothing he liked better than strawberries for breakfast. "Hallo, Hedge," he shouted; "Good morning."

The gardener looked up at the house without hesitation. He knew his master. "Morning, sir," he called. "Fine morning."

Aubrey glanced at the grey soft sky and out again to the sweet misty fields. Then he looked down again at Hedge. "Fine," he said. "Think we shall have rain?"

Hedge looked up to the grey soft sky in his turn and out over as much as he could see down there of the sweet misty fields. "Not so much," he finally opined, "though I think they're getting it at Waterhouses."

Aubrey could not see in the direction of Waterhouses, since that village lay behind his house and behind the great stretch of hill and woodland and moor, too, recently become a National Trust, which effectually prevented Harker's Orchard from ever being encroached upon from the north. So he shrugged his shoulders. "Let 'em," he said. "Strawberries for breakfast?"

"Yes, sir. I've got a fine basket."

"Splendid. Take some home to Mrs. Hedge. And tell Mrs. Mickle I'll be down in twenty minutes."

Aubrey turned back to the room, gathered up his bath robe, and proceeded to the bathroom, humming so loudly

that Mrs. Mickle, in the kitchen below, needed no warning from Hedge. The bathroom above, and Mrs. Mickle's own bedroom which opened from the passage a few feet from the bathroom door, were all that were left of the upper parts of the original ancient cottage upon which had been tacked the present house. The lower parts of the original were now all kitchen, the windows of which all but opened immediately upon the lane behind on either side of the original cottage door. Only a low box-hedge separated them from the lane. The window of the bathroom was a small diamond-paned affair, wreathed in jasmine, from which one could peer only by bending nearly double, low enough for the head of a man in a cart on the road to be on a level with its sill. Across the lane, the ground rose steeply again, through hazel woods, to the top of the Trust. The lane itself ran east to the main road over Pickworth Hill, and west to the ancient Manor, now shorn of most of its lands, where it passed through big gates to Saxon Top. It was thus practically a private road, unused except by the rare visitor to the Manor, the owner of the Orchard, and a few tradesmen's carts.

Aubrey drew a mug of hot water for shaving and turned on the cold for his bath. He continued to hum brokenly while he lathered, and permitted himself only a slightly shriller crescendo as he stepped into his bath. Towelling down, he literally sang. Thus he did not hear the postman get off his bicycle at the gate and would have been able to finish dressing with more tranquillity if the postman had not heard him. As it was, that official, knowing Aubrey's cheerful ways, stopped under the window and called up. "Good morning, sir."

"Eh?" cried Aubrey. "Ah, it's you, is it, postman? Good morning. Letter for me? Thanks. Half a jiffy."

He girt a towel about his loins and stretched a naked

arm through the window. The postman leaned up and handed him a letter. "Fine morning, sir," he said.

Aubrey glanced innocently at the letter, noticed the Dover postmark, and did not, partly on that account, recognise the handwriting. "Bit sticky for the bike, isn't it?" he queried genially.

The postman was glad of the chance to air his grievance. "Eh, sir, that it is," he said, eyeing the red machine with disapproval as he wheeled it out into the road. "This 'ere's old Army stock, and too 'eavy by a long chalk for the 'ills 'ereabouts. When it comes to a thirty-five-mile round too."

"They ought to provide you with a motor-bike," said Aubrey sympathetically, divided between growing curiosity as to the letter in his hand and interest in the postman under the window. "Thirty-five miles is too much for a pedal machine."

"Well, I dunno, sir," replied the other. "'Opping off and on as I 'as to do, a motor-bike 'ud be a bit of a nuisance. 'Sides, this don't go wrong, anyway. Motor's all right on the long straight runs, but up and down these 'ills, stopping every few yards—no, I'd rather stick to the old machine, sir. But not a great, heavy, lumbering thing like this 'ere. Made to carry a rifle and hammunion an' all. It's not right, sir."

"Good God!" exclaimed Aubrey.

The postman glanced up in surprise. Then he saw that the gentleman had opened his letter and was more interested in its contents than in him. He looked down again resignedly. "Well, I'll be getting on, sir," he said. "Good morning."

"Here," shouted Aubrey. "Wait a minute. Take a telegram for me, will you, postman? I shan't be a second. Hi! Mrs. Mickle! Mrs. Mickle! A telegraph form!"

Mrs. Mickle emerged from her kitchen. The postman

leaned his bicycle against the gate. Hedge appeared from the garden, round a thick lilac bush, with his basket of strawberries. And Aubrey, struggling half-wet into his bath-robe, dashed out of the bathroom shouting explanations and demands.

"Mrs. Mickle! Hi, Mrs. Mickle! Oh, there you are. I say, get me a telegraph form from the library, will you? Oh, and a pencil. Most extraordinary thing—friend of mine—thought he was in South Africa—arrived at Dover. Get the spare room ready: he ought to be here to-night. Ah! Thanks."

Aubrey, in bath-robe and slippers, had descended the oak staircase to the long pleasant room below that ran the whole breadth of the house and the length of the old cottage. It was hall and dining-room in one, entrance door on the left as one descended from above, French windows giving on to a pergola covered with roses and a grassy walk between herbaceous borders, on the right. On the north wall an ancient door led to the kitchen, and between two doors on the south, leading respectively to sunny sitting-room and library, a great fireplace had been modelled on an ancient pattern. Down half its length ran an oak table, at one end of which breakfast had been already laid for one. Disregarding the other end in his excitement and clearing a space between cups and plates, Aubrey sat down in his chair with the telegraph form before him. "Humph, humph, let me see. How shall we put it? Well, anyway: 'Thurstan, King's Arms, Dover. Yes, come to-day. Very welcome. Aubrey.' That will do, I think. Here it is, Mrs. Mickle. Oh, wait a minute. Thank you, Mrs. Mickle. We'd better give him the train." He crossed out "Aubrey" and added "Catch five-forty-five Victoria for Hordle. Aubrey." "There, that'll do. Let's see: one, two—is 'King's Arms' one or two words, Mrs. Mickle?"

"I'm sure I don't know, sir. I'll ask the postman."

"Never mind, never mind, Mrs. Mickle. Even if it's one, it's still more than a shilling. Give him half-a-crown and tell him to get a drink with the change. God bless my soul! Fancy Dick Thurstan back in England! But—there's some mystery here."

The little man sat on staring at the letter oblivious of his surroundings. Mrs. Mickle found him so as she returned with the dish of strawberries, and she paused in the doorway, shaking her head in her motherly way. "Mr. Linscott, sir," she said, "you'll catch cold in that there bath-robe. Besides, the eggs and bacon be almost ready. Won't you go and dress, sir, and read that again afterwards?"

Aubrey came out of his abstraction. "Yes, yes, of course, Mrs. Mickle. I'll not be five minutes. Hold up the bacon five minutes, will you? But I don't like this, I'm sure. Dick Thurstan of all people!"

"I hope the gentleman isn't ill," asked Mrs. Mickle, curiosity temporarily overpowering her anxiety.

"Oh no, Mrs. Mickle, not at all," said Aubrey, getting up. "Or at least it doesn't say so." Besides, Dick's never been ill in all his life, so far as I know. No, no, it's not that, Mrs. Mickle."

He mounted the stairs slowly, still glancing at the letter in his hand as he went. Mrs. Mickle deposited her strawberries on the table and stood for a second watching him. She was loath, now, that he should escape quite so soon and yet she could hardly ask the direct cause of her master's disturbance. Nevertheless, as he reached the little landing above, with his hand on his bedroom door, she spoke.

"Old friend of yours, sir, did you say?"

"Eh? Old friend? Yes, Mrs. Mickle, friend of mine when I was a boy. His people lived in the same

county. Saw each other in the holidays. Rather drifted apart, though, when he went up to Oxford, and—and afterwards. He became a—a—— Well—” (Aubrey hesitated in some confusion, under the circumstances). “But I met him again in South Africa, when I went there before the War, and we’ve corresponded once in a while since.” (Aubrey became reminiscent and absent-minded again.) “He had a most lovely Mission—grand scenery. We rode about a good deal together, over the mountains and so on. Wonderful, wonderful country. I shall never forget it, Mrs. Mickle.”

“A Mission you said, sir. Is Mr. Thurstan a clergyman, then, sir?”

“Eh? Er—er—yes. Or he was, Mrs. Mickle. I gather he—he is—on a holiday, now, Mrs. Mickle. . . . I believe that bacon is burning, by the way; can’t you smell it?”

“My, so it is. You won’t be long, sir?”

“Two minutes, two minutes—I won’t dress completely, Mrs. Mickle.”

Nor did he. In his bedroom, climbing into his shirt and drawing on his breeches, he stared again and again at the letter propped up on his dressing-table and in particular at the arresting phrase in it. For Dick, briefly stating that he had arrived at Dover and would like to pay a quiet visit to his old friend in the country if that were possible, had added: “By the way, don’t expect a priest, or even a Catholic. That is why I ask to come to you; it isn’t to everyone that I can go. Explanations later. Yours ever, Dick Thurstan.”

Thus, then, was Aubrey’s routine interrupted, for he sat down to breakfast in a dressing-gown, ate only one egg, and forgot, absolutely forgot, to mix cream with his strawberries.

II

There began for Aubrey a bad day, one of those bad days in which nothing can be done because an initial disturbance, mental or physical, paralyses action. Breakfast over, Aubrey should have sat down to *The Times* which usually arrived conveniently at that hour, but to-day he had to finish dressing, and even thereafter could not take his usual interest in the Irish troubles which were engrossing public attention at the time. "*Don't expect a priest, or even a Catholic,*" danced across the print and completely upset him. So he lit a pipe and went out into the garden.

Harker's Orchard, in the main, was quite modern, and the verandah on to which one stepped, either from the sitting-room or the study, was of a reasonable size. Aubrey called it the "stoep," with a romantic aspiration towards things South African, and indeed it was wide enough to justify the term. All its pillars were covered with climbing roses, their owner's pride and delight, and almost from its edge the smooth turf sloped away rapidly, to straighten below the grassy bank as soon as it found room. One bed, cut from the turf, flamed with orange antirrhinums, and another was all aglow with sweet-peas. A cherry and a couple of ancient peach-trees threw shade, and high hedges, in which blackberry vines and dog-roses were allowed to luxuriate, shut it in.

It was a lawn such as aristocratic owners of immemorial lawns would have despised, and not less would the majority of dwellers in the country have agreed with them. It was too irregular in its levels, too much cut up by flower beds, to permit any game short of one, invented by Aubrey, which consisted in rolling pennies down the bank for his kitten to chase. True, there was the tennis-court on the lower level, but the grass there

was new and lamentably attended, while roots from the giant trees around would eternally limit its growth. If ever Aubrey's guests accepted one of his wide-flung and generous invitations to play, they invariably commented on the "waste" of the upper lawn on their return from the nether regions.

Yet there were those who agreed with its owner. It was a lawn upon which one could wander and smoke and think. For its size—and it was not at all big—it offered the maximum of pleasure in that direction. And from the screen of its tall sweet-peas or from the depths of a pergola of ramblers one could survey Mrs. Mickle advancing to the verandah from the sitting-room and declaring to unwanted visitors, with a gesture of open innocence, that the master must have wandered out from the garden and gone for a walk.

Here, then, Aubrey paced for an hour or so and communed with simple things and his own soul. He rolled small, unripe, wind-blown apples for Felix (being destitute of pence); he watched ants milking aphides; he rescued a small butterfly from a big spider; he meditatively sampled a few premature and very sour blackberries, and he plucked a dog-rose blossom. By the side of the steps leading through the hazels to the kitchen garden he collected half-a-dozen wild strawberries in his palm and ate them in one fell mouthful. In the kitchen garden he surveyed his cabbages for a long time with an air of profound thought, and thereafter shrugged his shoulders and returned to the lawn. Whereat Felix, who had begun to find his master a bit tedious, rejoiced exceedingly, and while he bent to snip off a blown sweet-pea, dug his claws into his leg and leapt on to his back.

"Ow!" exclaimed Aubrey, fondling the big cat, "and what do *you* make of it all, Felicimus?"

For all the time Aubrey was reflecting upon his

singular letter and upon its author. It seemed to him one of the most portentous happenings in his life—that is if his interpretation of it were correct. “Don’t expect a priest, or even a Catholic.” And Dick Thurstan had written that—Dick Thurstan! Well, at least Dick had not been *kicked* out. That, at any rate, was an unthinkable hypothesis. Besides, the Roman Catholic Church never kicked priests out, did it? It sent them to—to Malta, or some such place, where they dropped into obscurity, so he had heard. The tale had been told him with a touch of awe, as if it were a kind of last fragment of the Inquisition. Once a priest, always a priest; wasn’t that the rule? Then how could Dick write that his friend was not to expect a priest or even a Catholic?

“Even a Catholic.” Hang it all, that was decisive. Dick, then, had lost his faith. He must have become some sort of a Protestant. And at that Aubrey’s world reeled.

For it scarcely seemed possible to Aubrey that anyone could *become* a Protestant. (He, of course, was not a Protestant; he was an Anglo-Catholic.) In Aubrey’s view, some persons were born Protestants—quite a large number, in fact; and of these the great majority ceased to practice any religion at all when they grew up. They vaguely believed in God, and on the whole tended to be married and buried with religious rites; but that was all. Their position, Aubrey thought, was largely due to the fact that they had never “seen” Catholicism. They had come across either the incomprehensible Roman variety, into which they had not enquired, or been put off the Anglican type by silly jokes in *Punch* or by Romanising clergy. As for those who were devout chapel-going Protestants, they were people of a mentality that Aubrey did not understand. Usually Radicals in politics. Philistines in Art, and English in mind. Odd people.

The sort of people one shrank from recognising as fellow-citizens on the Continent.

But did anyone *become* a Protestant? Impossible, Aubrey thought; anyone, that is to say, of intelligence who had once been anything else. Aubrey supposed that some persons were occasionally and genuinely converted by street-preaching and at revivals—coal-miners and people of that sort. He had, indeed, some sympathy with them, for about a Welsh Revival there was a smack almost of Catholic mysticism. But how could anyone be *attracted* to a Wesleyan chapel? How could anyone who knew anything of history or theology or logic assent to any one of innumerable systems that had obviously been invented to meet a special occasion and had changed colour with every new environment ever since? And least of all, Dick.

All this time he was recalling Dick. As boys they had shared in birds'-nesting and fishing expeditions; once or twice the combined families had sojourned together for six or seven weeks in Cornwall or Scotland. On such occasions they had practically lived together. And as a boy to whom religion was a vague thing, Aubrey had been struck by his friend's variety of it, and perhaps particularly by his friend's father's. Their Romanism had scarcely ever been mentioned in the combined households, but whereas Aubrey and his people used perfunctorily to go to Matins if there was a church handy, the Thurstans would rise at unearthly hours and drive to Mass. Once it had been curiously reversed. They were down in Kirkcudbright and Dumfries, and the hoary old "parish" church had been Catholic, while a tin shanty represented the Anglican mission. Then, for six weeks, the Linscotts had not gone to church at all, and the Thurstans had departed to the ancient building at reasonable hours and in a kind of state. Aubrey had

once wished to accompany them, and no one had raised any objection. He had been bewildered and had bothered Dick with questions, later on, as they kicked their heels in the heather. "What had it all *meant*?" he had asked. "Oh, just the Mass," his friend had concisely replied. "But at—at the Communion?" Aubrey had vaguely stammered, hardly knowing what he asked. "The Bread and Wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, you know," said Dick. Aubrey had stared at him through his spectacles, less awed than overwhelmed. "But—but—— You *believe* that?" he had finally queried. "Of course I do," Dick had said. And Aubrey had thought it all "queer," and had vaguely connected it with the fact that his friend went to some odd, to him almost unknown, Catholic school. At Eton the place was never mentioned. They had once quarrelled and almost fought as to whether or not it was a public school, only Aubrey had retired from the conflict, partly because Dick could have thrashed him with one hand and partly because the claim was so grotesque that it had scarcely seemed worth fighting about.

But at Cambridge Aubrey had become a mild sort of Anglo-Catholic. During the process of conversion, when he met his friend, he had attempted to pass on his new enthusiasms and discoveries. For a brief period, he had even attempted to raise an argument over Anglican Orders and the like. Dick, however, had never been "drawn." He would listen with a smile—and continue to be a Roman Catholic. While Aubrey had played with the idea of Orders, Dick had advanced steadily towards the goal of the Catholic priesthood as if he were obeying an indisputable law of Nature. When Aubrey's enthusiasm had waned a little, partly because there had been no necessity for him to take up any profession and partly because the step now seemed so different from the

thing originally suggested to him, Dick had continued to smile. And at last, when Dick had gone to his seminary and Aubrey to the Continent, even correspondence between them had almost ceased.

But when Aubrey had found himself in South Africa, the knowledge that Dick was up somewhere in the mountains had naturally drawn them together. Aubrey had gone up to see him, and had been indubitably impressed. Indeed, at this point in the reflections which the letter aroused, Aubrey became totally indifferent to Felix, the rose bushes or the blackberries. If it had not been for the War, and if Aubrey had stayed with the Mission priest much longer, anything might have happened. 'Anything. . . . That packed black congregation at Benediction. Those long weeks on trek, when Dick, in this hut or that village, would be suddenly transformed from the genial robust travelling companion to the efficient devoted priest, and when, thus transformed, he and his converts seemed to pass behind a screen and leave Aubrey's soul shivering without—*well*. But he had reached Penluma in June, 1914, and on the third of August had left for the Cape. And in France he had renewed his friendship with Haynes, and the two of them, each in his own way, had felt the need for God and sought Him where they expected He would be found.

And now: "Don't expect a priest, or even a Catholic!" *Dick*. Dick, the seemingly certain, unvexed, unargumentative Dick. The traditional Catholic. Aubrey suddenly remembered that Dick's father was still alive. He sensed tragedy. He began to wish he had worded the telegram more warmly. What had he actually said? Confound it all!

It took him another pipe and a big dose of lawn to recover personal equanimity, but he recovered it at last. He beamed over his spectacles at Felix. "Earth

changes, 'Felix my boy,' he soliloquised, "'but thy soul and God stand sure,'" and reached for a further supply of little apples. Gathering them, he suddenly recollected that Haynes was due on Monday.

He rolled his apples reflecting on that aspect of the situation. He was not sure how Dick and Haynes would mix; at least, if he was not sure what Dick would feel about Haynes, he was only too sure what Haynes would think, and probably say, about Dick. No; he must put Haynes off. With care and precision he rolled his last apple well behind the antirrhinums and removed himself hastily while Felix sought for it. The cat would follow him to the post-office if he didn't look out. And once before there had been a nasty scene with a dog.

III

Informing Mrs. Mickle that he was going out to the post, Aubrey put on his hat, took his stick, surveyed the heavens, decided that it would not rain, and set off for the nearest post-office in the tiny hamlet of Pickworth Hill. It was not far, and a charming walk. Passing into the lane behind the house, he left it almost at once for a bridle-path through the woods, down a steep decline, across a stile, along by a brook (with newts, in which Aubrey was still sufficiently interested), and finally through a meadow of lush grass pricked out with buttercups and daisies that skirted the tiny ancient church. Aubrey sauntered along, and so far forgot his anxiety over Dick as to hum. Mrs. Sturgus looked over her cottage garden wall and smiled upon him. He stopped to enquire about her ducklings and purchased a pound of mushrooms that her little girl had picked that very morning before breakfast. Steak and mushrooms for dinner, he decided, with a glass of his best sherry to

commence with. . . . He positively sang as he climbed the stile. In the meadow he paused to speak with Mr. George's cow. By the church gate he met the Vicar.

Aubrey did not much like the Reverend Maurice Burghley, and the Reverend Maurice Burghley did not waste much of his time on Aubrey. To be perfectly honest, he thought Aubrey a bit of an oddity, almost a "crank," and the parson had absolutely no use at all for oddities. Strong, hearty and fifty, with a wife and several children, two churches in one parish, Burghley was constantly on the move and profoundly practical. He smiled upon Aubrey now, but not in the least as Mrs. Sturgus had smiled upon him. He thought the little man cut rather a comic figure in his breeches and spectacles. If he had had no knowledge of him at all, he would not have thought about him twice, taking him in his stride, as it were, with the rest of the world. But the Linscotts were a good family, even if this son of the house remained a bachelor and lived so quietly, and moreover Aubrey had many clerical friends, even if they were of a rather futile type. Besides, Aubrey's religion faintly amused him. Aubrey had more than once talked to him about mysticism and had gone into raptures while showing him his garden. Maurice Burghley knew no more of Ruysbroeck and Walter Hilton than their names, and did not wish to know, but inwardly he was convinced that he knew them better than his parishioner did, since he knew them for lunatics whom a sane age would have diagnosed with accuracy. And he thought Aubrey himself harmless, but a little weak-minded.

Not that he ever gave himself away, and Aubrey, the last person to think wrong of any man, never credited him with such sentiments. He was only aware that the Vicar confused him interiorly, as it were, with his matter-

of-factness and excessive masculinity. As for Mr. Burghley's style of churchmanship—well, Aubrey regretted a good deal of it, but not so strongly as he might have done if it had been a little more pronounced. As things were, seeing how small was the hamlet and how ignorant, he was chiefly grateful that the clergyman always gave them one celebration a Sunday and that he celebrated after a manner quite tolerable for an Anglo-Catholic in these days of trial. He did not wear vestments and he did not ostensibly genuflect, but, at the simple village altar with its two lights and cross, he was reverent if a trifle brusque. His sermons Aubrey rarely heard, even if physically present at Evensong, for in the evening, in the hushed and clean-smelling little sanctuary, Aubrey quite genuinely and sincerely communed with his God.

They exchanged greetings.

"Morning, Mr. Linscott. How's the garden?"

"Morning, Vicar. Fine, thank you. Is Mrs. Burghley well?"

"Quite, thanks. Where are you off to? The village?"

"Yes. I've got to send a telegram. I've heard unexpectedly that a friend of mine is arriving from South Africa to stay with me, and I want to put off another visitor."

"We're having quite an influx from foreign parts, then. Have you heard who has arrived at Penscott Hall?"

"Penscott Hall? At Waterhouses? The Sinclairs, do you mean? No. Who?"

"Well, I suppose it won't affect us here or at Hordle, but the Vicar of Waterhouses ran over to see me this morning. He's a bit upset about it. Colonel Sinclair and his wife are both parishioners of his and come

regularly to church. They've Lady Ann Carew staying with them."

Aubrey stopped in the path and stared. "Heavens!" he exclaimed. "Then it was she who travelled with me from East Croydon last night!"

The clergyman looked interested. "You don't say so? What was she like? How do you know?"

Aubrey still stared at him, a little vaguely. It seemed to him awe-inspiring that he had talked with the notorious Lady Ann. He was turning it over in his mind and feeling glad that he had not known at the time who she was.

"Well," repeated Mr. Burghley, slightly amused, "was she so fascinating?"

"Eh? What? No, oh, no, not at all. That is to say—The Sinclairs met her," he ended lamely. For he remembered her necklace of wooden beads and the air of her, and was suddenly aware that she had been curiously attractive in a vague way that he had not thought twice about until now.

"So she was; was she," retorted Burghley, eyeing him. Then, grimly, "You saw the paper this morning?"

"No. I—I was late. And my friend's letter was unexpected."

"Then you missed a column or two of the sort of stuff no decent journal ought to print. Her story was reported in full, disgraceful as it is. How she had the face to appear in the Court at all, I don't know."

"Lord Carew got his verdict, then?"

"Of course. Any sensible man could have seen through the defence. She was forced to admit adultery during the War with a fellow in France who was killed, and said she refused to live with Carew because she had ceased to love him! I don't know what we are coming to. And I don't understand the Sinclairs."

Aubrey said nothing for a second or two. He was

sorry the subject had come up, that he had admitted to meeting the woman, that the Vicar should be speaking about it. Dimly, also, he resented the other's tone though he found no fault with his attitude. A great sin and an unsavoury scandal, it seemed to him that a priest should somehow speak differently about it. Yet Burghley had said nothing to which he could take exception.

"Frankly, I would rather not discuss the matter," he said at last.

"No? Well, I daresay your attitude is all right so far as you are personally concerned, Mr. Linscott. But it does concern the Church, and our neighbourhood particularly. She may wish to attend church with the Sinclairs; I should think she was that brazen-faced sort of woman. At any rate, you know these villages—she'll be the subject of discussion in every tavern. The papers have made a good deal of the case. Both she and Lord Carew were prominent in the War."

"I remember she and a friend ran a hospital between them in France," remarked Aubrey, mildly. "Several of our fellows went there and spoke very highly of it."

"Exactly. And she was probably betraying her husband all the time."

"I once met Lord Carew. I did not like him," said Aubrey. He was scarcely conscious that the other was arousing increasing antagonism in him and unaware that his tone suggested a defence.

"And what of that?" demanded the clergyman. "Really, Linscott, I should hardly have expected that you would have thought that that touched the case. I know nothing of Carew myself, but she married him, at St. Margaret's, and she had a double responsibility. A woman of social position ought to remember that she is in the limelight all the time."

Aubrey tried to change the subject. "I shan't meet her, anyway," he said. "I scarcely know the Sinclairs. And it need not trouble you since it is not in your parish."

"Mrs. Burghley calls regularly at the Hall. Nor is the Church a matter of water-tight compartments, my friend. I fear it does concern me rather closely."

Aubrey was suddenly curious. "What will you do, then?" he asked.

The clergyman meditated aloud. "I hardly know. I suppose, if one calls on the Sinclairs, one does not of necessity call on their guests. I should, however, most certainly support Firbank if he refuses to allow her to present herself at the altar. If it should come to that," he added.

They walked a while in silence. Aubrey's mind was veering, as was the way with it. The post-office in sight, he remembered his business there, and his business recalled Dick. Suddenly, almost at the door, he shot out a question.

"Have you ever heard of a Catholic priest giving up his Orders, Mr. Burghley?" he asked.

The Vicar laughed. Really that was rather like little Linscott! A sudden ridiculous question!

"Whatever put that into your head?"

Aubrey concealed the true facts with surprising adroitness. "I heard the other day of a case," he said. "I knew a little of the man and could not understand it."

"I believe there is invariably a woman behind the scenes," replied Burghley, smiling, "though the authorities usually try to hush it up."

Aubrey frowned. "Not in this case, anyway," he said firmly, stopping in front of the rustic gate of the cottage that did duty for village post-office. "Good-day, Vicar."

IV

Aubrey walked back in no happy state of mind. He was aware that the Vicar had left a nasty taste in his mouth, and when he hesitated again by the newt pond it was not newts that he saw. On the contrary, he became oblivious to his surroundings as he suddenly found himself putting two and two together in the best manner of the amateur detective. This is how it worked out :

First, his friend, Dick Thurstan, had left the Catholic Church.

Secondly, the Dick Thurstan he knew was the kind of man whose faith had never seemed to be in doubt.

Thirdly, therefore, Dick Thurstan had probably left the Church for some other reason than that of loss of faith.

That was conclusion number one.

Conclusion number two ran as follows :

First, Ann Carew had heard of Harker's Orchard on a ship from Port Said to Marseilles.

Secondly, Dick Thurstan, who might easily have come East Coast from South Africa, had wired to him from Dover about a week after Ann arrived in London.

Thirdly, therefore, if Dick had come round by sea and Ann had travelled by rail, they might have been together in Marseilles.

And the Vicar had said Catholic priests usually left the Church because of women.

When the Vicar had first made the suggestion, Aubrey had instantly repudiated it of Dick in his own mind. The whole idea seemed so totally unlike his friend and was so grotesquely repulsive to Aubrey. But the more he thought over the strange coincidence of his meeting with Lady Ann, of her knowledge of Harker's Orchard and of

the telegram from Dick, the less he liked the look of things. He realised, now, that something of the sort had been subconsciously in his mind when he had questioned Burghley about priests. Not once, however, did he reflect on his own position if he was about to put up a priest who had been ignominiously expelled from his office on account of adultery, but if that were true, then he was broken-hearted for his friend. Dick! Dick Thurstan! Dick of the honest, hard-working, straightforward type—that *Dick* should fall so low! And, as was natural, the more he allowed the idea to remain in his mind as a possibility, the more it seemed to him probable.

How long he remained staring into the little pool with the floating frog-weed on its surface and with the tinkle of the tiny brook in his ears, he did not know. At last, however, he began to see that an avenue of enquiry was even now open to him. Dick must obviously have left the Church before he got into the Mediterranean—unless he had been on a holiday and had fallen into this temptation on the way. But the other was more likely, anyhow. It was a working hypothesis. If that were so, he must have met Lady Ann in South Africa, and if *that* were so, the newspaper story might reveal whether or not Lady Ann had been in the Union at any time during the previous year. Once he had reached that conclusion, he hurried home. As he went one last terrible idea crossed his mind: the newspaper story might reveal Dick's name also.

Mrs. Mickle saw him enter the garden gate from the lane and hurry up to the clematis-covered porch. He was walking so rapidly that she paused in her labours to listen. She heard him open the door of the clothes closet and could see him, mentally, hanging up his hat and stick. Then she heard him cross quickly to the study

and shut the door of that room sharply. There were no other sounds.

Ten minutes later Hedge came in with a basket of string beans.

"Thanks, 'Edge," said Mrs. Mickle, "that'll do nicely. Gettin' a bit old, though."

"Plenty more comin' along, Mrs. Mickle. I've never run out of beans yet, and never will."

"No. You're as good as a greengrocer, 'Edge, though I do say it. . . . 'Edge, 'ave you seen the Master?"

"'E come in a few minutes back. I 'eard the gate."

"Yes. 'E's gorn and shut 'imself up in the library. Never a word to me. Usually 'e comes through the kitchen, to smell the lunch, 'e says. 'E's a nice cheery gentleman and I 'ope 'e's not h'upset."

Hedge scratched his head. "Why should 'e be h'upset?" he asked.

"Didn't 'e go and get a telegram this morning that put 'im about somethink dreadful? And didn't 'e go runnin' off after 'is walk in the garden to the post-office again? An' 'e never read 'is paper, neither, this mornin'." " 'E reads' is paper, regular, after breakfast in the mornin'." No, Mr. 'Edge, I don't like it, I don't."

Hedge stared at her. Slowly as his mental faculties worked, he was dimly aware that there was little to go on in all that she had said. "You've no call to go makin' a mountain out of a mole-'ill," he replied at last.

Mrs. Mickle set her hands on her broad hips. Her kindly face was honestly perturbed. "Who's makin' mountains out of mole-'ills?" she demanded. "Can't a sensible body put two an' two together without bein' told she is makin' a peck o' trouble out o' nuthink, 'Edge? Look 'ere, you go an' get a few flowers for the table. As you pass 'is winder you look in. See?"

Hedge shook his head slowly. "I don't like it," he said.

"Why? What's the 'arm? Well, I'll go then."

"No, no, Missis. I'll take a glance like. You go on with your cookin'."

Mrs. Mickle perfunctorily prepared her beans until Hedge's step announced his return. From his face she deduced his message. "Wot did I tell yer?" she demanded triumphantly.

"'E's pacin' up an' down the room without 'is pipe," said Hedge slowly. "Newspaper's a lyin' on the floor. When I ses: 'Shall I cut a few roses for the table, sir, as Mrs. Mickle wants?' he ses: 'Eh? What? Just as you like, 'Edge.' An' 'e goes on pacin' as if 'e don't care no more about 'is roses."

"No more 'e do, 'Edge. I told you so. There's trouble a-comin' to this 'ouse. Gawd 'elp us."

Indeed, Aubrey had found his clue. It had not taken him long to run his eye down the column and to get such of the story as *The Times* gave its readers. Lady Ann, cross-examined, had admitted the following facts. She had spoken clearly—it read as if *The Times* would have liked to have said brazenly—"not being in the least ashamed of it," she had once added. The Prosecutor had remarked that the Court was not interested in her ladyship's views on that matter, but would like to know if they were correct in saying that she had married Lord Carew in St. Margaret's, Westminster, on the thirty-first of January, 1915?

Yes.

She was then just eighteen years old?

Yes, by less than a month.

Lord Carew was then on public duty in the War Office?

Yes.

She had lived happily with him for two years?

No.

Oh! She had not lived with him for two years?

Yes, but not happily.

Could she give any reasons for her unhappiness ?

Yes. Lord Carew was ten years her senior and the match had been arranged for her. In those early days of the War, she had been full of it and rather dazzled by the fact that such a marriage meant life in London with a husband at the War Office. But almost at once she had discovered she did not love him. She had asked to be allowed to join some branch of Women's Service, and had been refused. She——

One moment. She had stated that she had discovered she did not love her husband. Why ? Had he been cruel to her ?

No.

Had she reason to suppose him unfaithful ?

No.

Had she any complaint of any sort to make ?

Well—— She doubted if it was of any use to tell the Court.

The prosecution ventured to think it would be of some use.

Then she had found that they were totally unsuited to each other. He was unimaginative, set in his habits, unsympathetic, and he did not really love her. She was——

He would suggest to her that she had made all these startling discoveries only after she had fallen in love with some one else ?

No. She had discovered it before.

Then she admitted that she *bad* fallen in love with someone else ?

At this point Lady Ann had been, according to the evening paper, "cornered." In point of fact she had hesitated and then grasped the rail of the witness-box and looked straight at the Judge. Would His Honour

allow her to say straight out what had happened? It would save time, she added.

His Honour saw no objection, if the prosecution agreed. He wished to say, however, that she was not in the least obliged to incriminate herself.

The prosecution had agreed, with a shrug of its shoulders.

"Your Honour," said Lady Anne, "when I married I was a young impulsive girl. I did not know what love was. But I was soon convinced that my husband did not love me as I wanted to be loved and as quickly discovered that we had nothing in common. As a means of relief, I begged him to allow me to take up some war-work in London, or, better still, abroad. He refused. It became a source of trouble between us all through 1916, and towards the end of that year, when my friend, Lady Fortescue, formed her private convalescent home for officers in France, she asked me to go with her. I then told my husband that I was determined to go, at my own expense, with my own money. He warned me that I was disobeying him and practically separating myself from him. We had a stormy scene, but in the end I went.

"I think as a result of the reaction, your Honour, I fell in love with a wounded officer in France. I should like to say that Lady Fortescue was innocent of the whole affair. She knew my feelings, and warned me against them, but she did not know that I spent a week's leave with him in Paris. That was in November, 1917. I confess that voluntarily in the hope that no further evidence, disclosing his name and rank, will be required. He had won the M.C. and had twice been mentioned in despatches. He loved me very much indeed—more than I was worthy of, more than I loved him, and I am proud that he did so. He was killed in

March, 1918, outside Amiens. That is the story, your Honour."

There had fallen a little silence in the crowded Court. A woman or two wept openly. Lady Ann was well known, and no one could forget the services she had rendered, which had made her, at the time, a popular heroine. In 1918 she herself had been no longer at the Convalescent Home, but in a bombed hospital near the line. That, too, had been a newspaper "story." Also there was, in the way in which she made her brief statement, an element of pathos not to be disregarded. More than one of those present seemed to live again through the years when all conventions slipped away in the face of the unknown morrow.

But the prosecutor was on his feet.

"That is not quite all the story which we require, your Honour. I wish to continue. My client, Lord Carew, was prepared to make allowances for the youth of his wife and for the excitement of the time. You will hear with what result." He addressed himself to Lady Carew.

The hospital was finally closed in February, 1919?

Yes.

She had returned to England?

Yes.

She had received a letter from her husband offering to forgive her if she would return to him?

Yes.

She had refused?

Yes.

She had said that she considered it immoral to live with a man whom she did not love?

Yes—or words to that effect.

She had on several occasions declined to meet Lord Carew and discuss the matter with him?

Yes. She knew her own mind and had quite finally decided.

About a year later she had gone to Paris ?

Yes.

He had followed her and she had left to avoid him ?

Yes.

She had finally gone to South Africa to escape him ?

Yes.

She was aware that her husband had reason to believe that she had again been unfaithful to him ?

"I object to that question," said Lady Ann, boldly.

"I am aware that my husband believed various scandalous rumours about me, and I admit that at the time I was indifferent to whether he believed them or not, but I am prepared to swear that he had no ground for such belief and I do not see how any evidence can be brought forward in proof of it."

"You did not set off on various expeditions in South Africa alone with men, and in questionable circumstances ?"

The paper reported that Lady Ann had flushed. Then she said, "haughtily":

"There were nearly always other women present. Once or twice, under exceptional circumstances, there were not, but these were honourable gentlemen. I have already said that I consider it immoral to live with a man I do not love, and I did not love any of these gentlemen."

At that Aubrey skimmed half a column of wrangling upon the details of these various and plainly most unwise expeditions, looking for "Thurstan" to be mentioned and relieved when it was not. Then he came to the defence. Apparently it had been urged that the husband had condoned to and thereafter condoned the war-time adultery; indeed, counsel had endeavoured to

enlist sympathy for his client by a clever but (to Aubrey) nauseating appeal to war-time sentiment. But he had strenuously insisted on Lady Ann's legal "innocence" in South Africa. He was there to defend his client's normal virtue. As if that mattered much, Aubrey thought, for she might still be innocent in a court of Law and guilty enough as far as Dick was concerned. And then his eye fell on a further paragraph.

His Honour had interposed. He understood Lady Ann still persisted in refusing to return to her husband? "That is so, my Lord."

And it was at that point that Aubrey dropped his paper and commenced to pace the room, at that point that Hedge asked him about the flowers and at that point he declared his complete indifference to them. He was also largely indifferent to his lunch. And a telegram that arrived shortly after ("Splendid. Meet me Hordle to-night. Dick.") only deepened his gloom and confirmed Mrs. Mickle in her worst suspicions.

Aubrey was convinced that Dick had somehow become mixed up with Lady Ann and had been sacked in consequence. He had only one ray of hope. If Lady Ann had spoken the truth, Dick had been misjudged by the authorities, and a misjudgment on their part would scarcely shatter the faith of such a man. But how could he be sure that Lady Ann had spoken the truth? Such a woman!

V

Aubrey paced up and down Hordle platform in the gloaming, a prey to his worst fears. His little car waited outside, the station-master had told him that the five forty-five from Victoria was running to time and the rain had kept off. Just about now Mrs. Mickle would be engaged with the steak and mushrooms. The sherry

was prepared to do its duty. He had not seen old Dick for eight years, and yet, and yet. . . .

The signal fell. Far off a light appeared. Dick was carried past him leaning out of a third-class window.

Aubrey's fears flew as he gazed. His friend looked older, a little worn, but very well. He was smiling and waving. He wore a soft collar and a grey tie. In a few seconds they were clasping hands.

"My dear fellow," began Aubrey.

"Aubrey, you're an absolute brick. I really wired quite on spec. You see I didn't know where to go. My poor old people won't take me in."

(So there was nothing to be concealed, to be hinted at merely; they could speak openly.)

"But, Dick, old man, it's a terrific surprise, you know. Is—is—what you said—true?"

Dick's smile left his face. It perceptibly hardened, at which Aubrey's heart fell. There was a new tone in his friend's voice as he said: "Quite true, Aubrey. It's a long yarn, and I want to tell it you, but you know the end from the beginning. You still do not mind receiving me?"

The little man blinked behind his spectacles. "Dick, Dick, you know I—you—— Come on. My car's waiting. There's steak and mushrooms for dinner!"

Gratitude and emotion had Dick by the throat for a moment. Then he laughed. "Still the gourmand. And the wine, Aubrey?"

Aubrey stopped by the car door. "Dick," he said solemnly, "I've such sherry as you have never tasted. I ought to hang on to it, but there's a bottle open. And I've a 1914 claret that's quite good."

"Jump in," cried his friend, "quick, Aubrey. Make her hum, old dear. And I'm dying to see Harker's Orchard."

They ran down the station road and out into the main. "Hordle village is behind us, Dick," said Aubrey, who delighted in grave explanations to his guests. "Pickworth Hill's ahead, and such a view. To-morrow, though. You had a good run down?"

"Excellent. And up. I arrived at Dover last night, from Paris."

"But when did you leave South Africa?"

"Six months ago and more. I got your letter telling me of your purchase only just in time. An omen, I thought. I wandered up the East Coast, and then through Egypt and most of Palestine and Syria. I've had a wonderful time, Aubrey."

Aubrey could not help himself. "Met many people, Dick?" he asked, staring straight ahead at the white road.

"People? Oh, yes, lots of them. They're half the story."

Aubrey swallowed in his throat. "Did you meet—er—Lady Ann Carew in South Africa, or elsewhere, Dick?"

"Lady Ann Carew? No," said Dick, "never heard of her. Why? Who the dickens is she?"

CHAPTER V

The Dust-Heap

I

"But, Dick," cried Aubrey, and there was a note almost of terror behind the personal concern of the voice, "you cannot absolutely and literally mean that!"

"I fear I do."

"You—you've ceased to believe—even in—in God?"

From the arm-chair on the other side of the library fireplace, Dick Thurstan nodded. His face was hard again, Aubrey noticed, as it had been for that moment on the station platform, and the eyes intent as they stared, without seeing, at the piled fir-cones in the grate that lay ready against a cold evening. "You put it crudely, Aubrey," he added, "but it comes to that."

"But how, *how*, Dick? I don't understand. You! When I remember those days with you at Penluma and Hlakanelo and over the Range, I—I——" Aubrey's voice trailed off. He made a hopeless little gesture.

Dinner was over, and with it conversation that had had mainly to do with old friends and reminiscences. Dick himself had spoken freely of Africa, even of Paul Maria and Nathaniel and Stephen and Sister Angela, whom Aubrey had met when staying with him. That had been towards the close of the meal, for they had begun far back, as two such friends will, with boyhood days and vacations. Encouraged, Aubrey had ventured at last to ask definitely about the things that mattered most, and Dick had freely told him of his last retreat, of his interview with the Bishop, of his resignation, and finally of his departure. But he had spoken only superficially, as it were, while they sat at table, and it was only in the study, when the coffee had been taken away and Mrs. Mickle had bidden them good-night, that there had begun the series of questions which resulted in the declaration of Dick's present agnosticism.

"I don't understand!" cried Aubrey again.

Dick raised his eyes and looked the other in the face. "You wouldn't, Aubrey," he replied, "chiefly because your religion is the kind that it is. I don't want to be rude, or to hurt you, but there it is."

The little man flushed. "Don't be a fool, Dick," he said. "What's the good of a friend if he can't permit

himself to be hurt ? Besides, my God, are we discussing a difference of opinion in Art, or the taste of food ? ”

“ Thanks,” replied Dick. “ You’re a good chap, Aubrey, and I was an ass to hesitate. Well, frankly then, I think it’s like this. Your faith has never been logical, precise. It’s always been a matter of emotion. You’ve slowly added to a foundation of belief in God and Christ that belonged to your family atmosphere as a normal part of existence, this and that new idea that appealed to you from time to time. You have hammered at each belief, perhaps, in the process of adding it, but the result has been that you’ve gradually furnished your house with goods of a devotional and credal nature which you like. One day, in a sort of surprise, you discovered that the result was Anglo-Catholic, and you’ve been quite happy ever since. A little worried, possibly, now and again, by this or that, but on the whole quite satisfied. Isn’t that fairly true ? ”

“ I don’t know. Possibly. I’ve never thought it out like that.”

“ Exactly. You’ve never thought the whole out because you’ve been too busy with the component parts. But with me it has been the exact opposite. I was born and bred in a furnished house which had been most carefully built up and arranged for a couple of thousand years. I took the whole of it in without question. I still judge the whole as a whole, and not in bits. In our house, you’ve no other choice. If you don’t like the drawing-room suite, you can’t scrap it and refurnish. You’re permitted, sometimes, to go and live in an attic, but even in the attic you’re not permitted to criticise the fundamental perfection of the taste that furnished the drawing-room. Should you do so, loud enough, you are put out. Or you put yourself out. Which is what I did.”

"But God, Dick. Christ. How have you lost faith in Him?"

Dick sighed. "You don't see the point," he said. "I told you you couldn't. God and Christ are only part of the house, Aubrey, foundations, perhaps, but part of a whole. To you they're unquestionable in themselves. You could go on believing in them without the Church; a Catholic couldn't."

"Well," expostulated Aubrey, "surely——"

Dick cut him short. "In a way I thought so myself at first, I'll admit. The real issue was not more clear to me than it is to you now. I was worried over details, too. But the moment my mind had got over the details, I saw what still appears to me to be the inevitable collapse of the whole"

"Tell me."

Dick shifted his position and once again looked away from his friend as if Aubrey's face distracted his attention. For a while he was silent while the other waited. "Look here," he said at last, suddenly, "you don't want a long argument, I'd sooner tell you what happened than attempt to hammer out why it happened. We can do that later, if you like. If you'll let me stay on with you for a bit, that is."

Aubrey got up to fetch his pipe and tobacco. "Don't be an old ass," he said more happily. "Now or ever you're more than welcome here. You know that. If you don't, you never will."

"Thanks," said Dick. "I do know. Only you can't realise what I've been through this past year, Aubrey. I've lost practically all the friends I've ever had, and even those who haven't in so many words given me up, have proved impossible. You see the best Catholics are as charitable as possible, but then, just because they're the best, they're the most concerned for my welfare.

And it's difficult to live happily with a man who loves you very much and is convinced you're on the road to hell. He's bound to take any opportunities that offer to make an effort to save you. He'll even promote opportunities."

Dick spoke dryly, but Aubrey realised what experiences must have lain beneath that curt summary of the position. "Poor old Dick," he said.

"No. Don't say that, Aubrey. I wouldn't go back—now. Though sometimes I'm lonely beyond words, I wouldn't go back. And the worst loneliness is not the loss of friends. It's the feeling that the whole universe is blank. Empty. Nothing in life and nothing beyond death. Oh, I can understand why people cling to the idea of God! But that's sheer cowardice, in reality. And it's never *good* to be a coward or to acquiesce in cowardice for comfort's sake, Aubrey."

Aubrey sat very still. Felix jumped to his knees unrebuked. Making himself comfortable, the big cat's loud purring filled the room.

"Imagine," went on Dick at last, "saying Mass every day for ten years—saying it with the faith you understand. Suddenly there is no more Mass. It's like being knocked senseless in the heart of London and awaking alone in the Sahara. No; that's stupid. It's much worse."

He roused himself. "But it's getting late and I've got to tell you what happened in the interior of me, so to speak. First, my doubts as to the Catholic Church being the supernatural divine Society—'the very Body of Christ'—came to a head. They were beginning when you were in South Africa, though you didn't realise it, my friend. It began by seeming so impossible that I, Dick Thurstan, with all my faults and foolishness, should be opening and shutting the gates of Heaven. The

more my people believed, and the more their faith was confirmed with signs and wonders, the more I doubted. I began to realise how easily a simple people can *imagine* things. When a sick native saw Our Lady and the Infant Jesus enter a hut beside me, Dick Thurstan, and smile when I blessed him, I began to realise how likely it was for him to think so and how unlikely it was to happen in fact. I knew the natives liked me, that they believed in me, that I was able to move and control them ; but—well, no one ever saw Our Lady and the Child Jesus walking with Father Lauriston whom they did *not* like, though he was a much better man than I ! And from that first question, I went on to question the whole. Never mind the steps. Ultimately I concluded that the Catholic Church was a wonderful and exceedingly attractive human institution, but no more. And when a *Roman* Catholic priest realises *that*, Aubrey, he has to get out. If he's honest. Thank God, I think I was.

"So I got out, and it was—— Oh, it's absurd to say 'hell.' It was much worse. I think I left my heart in the mission that last Sunday night, Aubrey. I don't know how I went through with it. I can look back at it now calmly enough—because my heart is a stone. But it was not so then. Their tears and cries . . . I heard them at night again and again. And Philip, next day. You see, he knew I was deserting him. And down in Natal, where I went to wander about aimlessly and think, I couldn't think for weeks. It was just a blank, an awful blank. My life was over, finished. Thirty-five years uprooted, wasted, gone. And I still alive, quivering. . . ."

Aubrey sat looking at him through a blur. Felix's purr had dropped to a contented murmur which he made when he remembered how comfortable he was. And he soon forgot that altogether in the queer silence that had fallen on the two humans, and slept.

"I'm not sure," went on Dick at last, "that the most humiliating thing in human life is not our power of forgetfulness. That we should be broken-hearted, genuinely and completely feel that all is over, that we have lost our dearest, and yet that we should wake up one day to discover that the bitterness is past. Can a scab form over the soul? Or is it all purely physical, and can one recover from what one thinks is a spiritual hurt as one can recover from a disease? Are broken hearts not so different, after all, from broken legs? Anyway, I found myself recovering. The *personal* sense of loss and pain began to pass, and I commenced to view the intellectual position in which I found myself."

He stopped, thinking. Then he laughed. "What is it?" asked Aubrey.

"I was only thinking how easily I should have diagnosed my spiritual condition in another person while I was still a priest. 'You turn your back on the grace of God, and all faith dies in your soul,' I should have said. So it has been with me, Aubrey, but I sense a less wonderful reason. Once outside the Church, once clear of the encumbering woods, I began to realise the truth of things. And I began to see, Aubrey, that God Himself was an attractive human institution, but no more."

Aubrey Linscott sat on, doubting his ears. *Dick Thurstan* was speaking! Dick Thurstan, in a soft collar. . . .

"You see," went on the quite obviously and certainly Dick Thurstan of his friend's wonder, "there is really a parallel between the two cases. Catholicism has been a wonderful invention of the human mind to meet its needs for a refuge, a system of things, a scapegoat, a final balancing hereafter of the damnable inequalities of life. It was invented to deal with the mysteries that beset us and that we dare not look in the face—that honesty is not

always the best policy, that pain and death do not choose the people they ought to choose, that, at the end of the argument, man is of no more importance in the world than any other animal. The soul, heaven and hell, a Saviour-Victim—all these ideas help to balance man's acknowledged impotence and intense aspiration. He is intelligent enough to abhor the unknown. If he can't fill it with a natural reason, he fills it with a supernatural. Besides, the latter is far less trouble. He's a natural coward, into the bargain, and it's a good excuse for cowardice. And once the void is filled, even a brave man may be excused for fearing the devil! But I had no longer any excuse. I hadn't a devil left in my theology.

"And God, Aubrey, is only another invention. The last and greatest. In a real sense, the last ditch. Popular, too, because the easiest of all explanations of the unknown. Vitalism, the Nebular Hypothesis—all that sort of thing, what does it mean, what does it come to? Nothing. It isn't big enough. Such things are good theories, but man doesn't want a good theory. The better the theory is, the more plainly it's a theory. But God now, Mumbo-jumbo, the Unknown, the Eternal, the Inexplicable, the Ineffable—all the magic words that are magic because they are beyond thought—*that* you can't get behind. So God Himself is a most attractive human institution, very nearly universal in some form or another for that very reason."

"Dick, Dick," stammered Aubrey.

Dick's tone changed. "Sorry, Aubrey," he said "perhaps I was offensive. I don't really mean to be, for it's unphilosophical to be angry. And yet, in a way, I confess it, I am angry. I hate being cheated. I was so solemnly assured, you see, so *played up to*, so deliberately enmeshed. What did I know of the world at twenty

three? What of Nature, of Science, of Mind? Nothing. So I swallowed God cheerfully."

"And now?"

"I can't, Aubrey. I think, now, at long last—mind you, it did not happen in a minute—I *could* not bring myself again to pray to a Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth. There is not the faintest evidence for such a being, Aubrey, not the remotest evidence that would stand a court of law. Prayer is not answered. Miracles do not happen. There is the unexplained, yes; but it is no explanation of the unexplained to account for it by another inexplicable. And still worse, although we cannot yet explain the unexplained, we can form some opinion about it. There are adjectives you can use about it. The great laws of Nature are, for example, heartless, a-moral, and if purposeful, most often purposeful for a purpose that is plainly not the amelioration of human beings. Some enormous electric plant lights a city. Incidentally it lights the flies in the houses. But it's not concerned with lighting the flies."

There was again a silence. Dick leant forward and selected a cigarette. "It is better not to say much about God, Aubrey," he said. "If He exists He has unpleasant qualities so far as you and I are concerned. He must in that case have set 'Nature' going."

"How long did it take you to get to all this?" asked Aubrey at length.

"I don't know, Aubrey. A good while. It was a slow process. Rather a wonderful one, though. And I'm still working out its conclusions. I'm wondering, for example, what one can substitute for morality. You see there is no longer right or wrong."

Like a spectre, Lady Ann Carew re-formed in Aubrey's mind. Thoughts buried for some hours now rose again

from the dead. "Lying? for example?" ventured Aubrey suddenly, and flushed red.

"Lying?" Dick smiled mischievously. "Well, naturally, many lies are justifiable. More often a lie is obviously better than truth-telling. Why?"

"You think so?"

Something in the other's tone roused Dick. "Old man," he said, "what's worrying you? Do you think I'm lying about something? You needn't. As a matter of fact, Truth is one of my gods just now. And as for social and conventional lies, I think, on the whole, I tell them less readily now than I did a year ago. You see I don't care much just now for Society, or the conventions."

Aubrey heaved a sigh of relief. "Dick," he said, "I don't know what to say to it. You're out of my depth. But—but—I believe in God, Dick. And in you. He—He sees you're honest, Dick. That's everything. Let's go to bed."

"Let's," said Dick, much moved.

II

It was on Chipping Wold, watching a sunset, that Dick dealt Aubrey a further crushing blow. They sat in the summer bracken under a sombre spreading of stout pines on the long ridge. The sun was setting over Kniveton and West Chilham, where the trees really do thicken almost to a forest. Copse on copse lay, heavy purple shadows, on the distant hills. One could see West Chilham tower black against long bars of crimson. The east, too, was infinitely clear with translucent green and the primrose yellow of vast space. To the north Kent lay at their feet bathed in sunshot haze; to the south, Sussex, greying in the shadows.

"Dick," said Aubrey, "who made the sunset beautiful if it was not God?"

Dick continued to regard the loveliness for a while without speaking. Then he said: "Man, Aubrey."

The little man stared at him. Then he smiled. "*Man* Dick?" he queried.

"Certainly, Aubrey. There are no colours there at all, you know. You and I created them."

"Oh, come, but that's rubbish."

"It isn't. It's merely fact—a fact that's got more in it than either of us see, I expect. Don't you know, Aubrey, that so far as we can tell the whole of space must be black and soundless?"

"What in the world do you mean?"

Dick turned towards him, eager, as his manner was, with the prospect of argument. "See here," he said. "Take sound. It's easier. Listen. Can you hear anything?"

They both listened, intent, a puzzled expression that was almost comic on Aubrey's face. It was utterly still. Then a train whistled down below in Hordle and Aubrey cried: "There!"

They both laughed, but Dick quickly recovered. "Well now, Aubrey," he went on, "there are at least, I suppose, a dozen broadcasting stations audible from this ridge. Suppose, which God forbid, we had a dozen loud speakers here, attached to a dozen receiving sets. Conceive the din!" He pulled out his watch. "Children's Hours, mostly. 'Are you there, children? Uncle Talbot speaking!' 'If Ivy Smith will go to the coal-scuttle she will find something that will please her.' 'And Jack put on the magic cap and the Dragon couldn't see him *at all*!' But Paris gives the Exchanges about now, I believe, and possibly The Hague, or some other damned place, will be lecturing. We should, literally, not be able to hear ourselves speak, Aubrey."

"In other words," said Aubrey, thoughtfully, "sound is——"

"Soundless, my friend, as colours are colourless. To a blind man the whole world looks black—because he sees it as it is. To a man on Chipping Wold at six-thirty p.m. on a summer's evening, it all sounds very still because sound-waves pass him by as they really are. Once give him a receiver, however, and sound-waves become sound so that a score of aunts and uncles he did not know he possessed shout in his ears. And once give a blind man eyes, and the colourless light waves are transformed into a sunset."

"But God gave us eyes and ears."

"Did He? How do you know? Who told you?"

Aubrey sat silent. He looked very unhappy. Dick glanced at him and changed his tone. "I'm sorry, Aubrey, but I can't help it. I'm in the grip of bitter logic, as a reaction, I suppose. Also, after having been a confounded sentimentalist for years, realism, though bitter, seems to me good. Besides, what I know of Africa helps."

Aubrey gathered little pebbles and began to throw them at a distant stone.

"You see," went on Dick, "my Africans had eyes and saw not, ears and heard not. It was the rarest thing to find one who saw a sunset. I'm not joking. They were, on the whole, as indifferent to the unutterable glories of a sunrise over a thousand peaks up on the Berg as a blind man would have been. It meant light, that was all. Day, and time for mealie-meal. If you drew their attention to the sunrise, they simply said 'Ah' and looked away. And when I found that Paul Maria would rein up his horse to look at a flower or a cloud, I knew he was converted indeed. But he was almost the only one. To the end even Philip was indifferent."

"No, Aubrey, Man forced the gift of eyes and ears out of Creative Evolution—how, why, there's no knowing and very little guessing. Probably because they were useful in avoiding an ichthyosaurus when man was still unable to fight him. And at some point in the Evolution process the human mind began to find the gift rather more than useful. Man discovered that the strictly utilitarian business of avoiding an ichthyosaurus might also be used pleasurably in relation to flowers and sunsets. Something in him woke up. . . . By Jove, Aubrey!"

"Eh?" cried his friend, startled.

Dick leapt to his feet. Aubrey saw a man transformed. His face was lit up and transfigured. He gazed on him amazed. "My dear chap, what is it?" he demanded.

"Why," cried Dick excitedly, "can't you see? Heavens, for the first time since I left the Church I've got a clue! Aubrey, don't you know the feeling? Balboa on the summit of the Andes, Pasteur in his laboratory, Mme. Curie looking at the first bit of radium, Adam's finding Neptune—they've nothing on me, as the Yanks say! Aubrey, old fish, it's an incredible sensation. Thousands have had it before, I daresay, but that makes no odds. It's new to *me*. I'm a discoverer. I see!"

"What in the world are you talking about?"

"Why, go on where I left off. Let's continue to think. Something in man woke up, I said. So it did. What? The ability to admire a rose. But why, why? Why, Aubrey? You can't answer that, eh? They'll tell you you get an eye because it was the purposive function of some bally blood-cell. I daresay. But having got an eye, man didn't see beauty. And when he did, were there more blood-cells with purposive functions? Not on your life! It wasn't any more

damned blood-cells, however purposive, that enabled Paul Maria to see what Philip never saw. It was something else, Aubrey, something——”

“The soul,” said Aubrey, with eyes like a baby looking at the moon.

Dick gestured. “Hold on, old dear,” he cried. “For God’s sake go slow. Don’t be a blessed father of the Church, Aubrey. That’s exactly where they got bogged. Inferences. Inferences based on pre-suppositions. Go slow, Aubrey, go slow.”

“Then I don’t see that it helps you much,” said Aubrey.

Dick turned to the west, where the light was now a mere glow in the dark of the fast-coming night. He did not answer for a minute, and when he did, Aubrey realised, possibly for the first time, what the past year had meant for his friend.

“Aubrey,” he said slowly, “I heard of a man in the War whom a shell buried in a dug-out for two days and two nights. There was no particular scrap on : the shell came out of a clear sky. Think of it : light, talk, life ; and then, suddenly, the darkness of the tomb, hope all but gone, a slow death. For forty-eight hours he tunnelled and fell on masses of decay in the dark and fought with rats and heard nothing but his own heart. For forty-eight hours he expected the roof to fall in as he moved. And at last, at arm’s length in a tiny tunnel, he stuck his bayonet through to the sun. . . . That’s what I feel like, Aubrey. . . . Come ; it’s getting late ; let’s go.”

They scarcely spoke as they made their way to the car, or for the first mile or two, until they had settled down to the night and the bright light on the road ahead and the swift wind of their passing. Then Aubrey asked, humbly : “Exactly *what* did you see, Dick ? ”

"Something between my own finger and thumb that wonderfully, mystically, couldn't be explained, Aubrey," replied Dick laughingly.

III

Among the greater peculiarities of Aubrey Linscott was this: breakfast, and the hour thereafter, were his strong periods. The first of them he gave up to the whole-hearted enjoyment of porridge, bacon and eggs, toast, marmalade, and coffee, like the robust Englishman that he was. The second he usually devoted to *The Times*, but not in the semi-somnolent fashion of the majority of those who have ability to eat a hearty breakfast and leisure to digest it. Aubrey, over *The Times*, would discuss politics with Felix if he could find no one else. Mrs. Mickle, at the General Election after her entry into Aubrey's service, voted Liberal, for the only time in her life, with a certain amount of intelligence. She had heard Aubrey over *The Times* after breakfast too often.

Naturally enough, then, it was with his back to the empty fireplace, with *The Times* behind his back, and with the French windows wide open to the sun and air, that Aubrey propounded a very definite question to Dick. "Look here, Dick, what are you going to do? Of course I'm only too glad for you to stay here as long as you like—you know that—but—but——" Aubrey trailed off. He rarely got to the end of an inspiration.

Dick, who was cleaning a pipe by the window, continued to do so. The few seconds gave Aubrey his opportunity again. "I've an idea," he continued.

"Yes?" queried Dick.

"You see," went on the little man argumentatively, "it's time I thought of a holiday, or nearly so. When I

go away, I hate going alone. You're here and there's nothing to prevent you coming with me. Why not you and I clear out, and go to—to——?" He floundered.

"Yes? Where to?"

"Well, say Cornwall or Devonshire. I know a jolly place—— Or let's go to the Scillies. I've never been there. I believe they're toppin'. Or the Pyrenees—— let's run down to the jolly old Pyrenees, Dick, you and I."

"Or the Atlas Mountains, Aubrey. Jolly old Atlas, you know."

"Don't rag, Dick."

"I won't, old dear. But you're too transparent, Aubrey. Have you ever in all your life taken a regular holiday other than in August? Just a holiday, I mean. And you have an idea it would be good for me. . . . Aubrey, I've been wandering up Africa, from Natal to Egypt, to say nothing of Europe, for a year and more."

"But—but—but what are you going to *do*, Dick?"

"Go on wandering, soon," said Dick. "I've about two hundred and fifty a year. A single man can wander more or less indefinitely on that."

"You ought not to go alone."

"Why not?"

"It's—it's—bad for you," ended Aubrey weakly.

Dick finished cleaning his pipe and blew through it vigorously. "Listen, Aubrey," he said. "When I cleared out of the Mission, I hadn't two ideas left in my head. I only knew I had to get out, and that getting out hurt damnably. But once out, once over the worst of the hurt, I began to glimpse something."

"What?"

Dick hesitated unusually for him. He commenced meditatively to pack his pipe at a tobacco-jar on the table, saying nothing. He finished at last and turned with it in his hand to his friend. "Aubrey," he said,

"I feel as if I were on a quest. I know that's absurd, and all the rest of it, but what I've got to do is to get ground under my feet. When a man had religion as I had it, and when suddenly he loses it, the solid earth reels under him. I've thought, Aubrey, sometimes, that I couldn't go on living: to be honest, at this moment I feel that fearfully. What's the use? What's the end? And yet one doesn't want to die without an effort. I won't, anyway."

"What sort of effort?"

"An effort to get a philosophy of life again, a working basis, as it were. I've got to, Aubrey. I can't live without it." He gestured. "Don't you see? If one merely exists from day to day, what's life for? What's it worth? And ordinary things don't satisfy. If I got a job in an office, or tried to write stories instead of essays, novels instead of verses, what's the good? I've enough to live on as it is. One's got to do something more with life than just absorb food, or create a—a shoe manufactory, or found a family. Or so it seems to me."

"You're still the priest," said Aubrey.

Dick stared at him. "By God, so I am," he said slowly. "It hadn't dawned on me. Yes, Aubrey, I still look at things *sub specie æternitatis*. Or try to. Things without eternal values do seem to me useless. For a while I tried to live from day to day. I've even written an essay on it. 'The Gospel of the Daffy-down-dillies.' Pretty title, eh, Aubrey? But it doesn't work."

"So—so——" stammered the other.

"I've got to find a substitute for God, Aubrey, failing the gentleman himself."

"Don't!" There was real distress in the cry.

"Sorry again, Aubrey. I didn't mean it. At least I did, but I didn't mean to hurt you. But that's one

reason why you and I can't sail off together, old dear. I'm still raw and blasphemous underneath, and I'd hurt you. Besides, I'd have bad times, *en route*. I had several, coming up. And I'm sure there are more to follow."

A little silence fell between them. Aubrey crumpled his paper. At last he spoke. "Dick."

"Yes?"

"Dick—er—I say, I hate to say it. But two hundred and fifty pounds isn't—er—well, it isn't much. I've more than I want, Dick, heaps more. Couldn't you take a little of it? Suppose you got a cottage somewhere, a decent little place, and sat down to something. Writing. You'd soon pay me back." He withered up at that. Dick's eyes did not leave his face.

"Aubrey," said Dick, "it would be silly to thank you at length. After all, I'd do it for you, if the situation were reversed. But I do thank you. You are too good to be true, Aubrey. But it won't do, old dear. No; I'll get out in a few days and see what comes."

Aubrey flushed. He shifted still more uneasily. "Where?" he demanded at length.

Dick laughed. He swung round and glanced through the window. "I don't know," he said, "but I ought to. I'll go for a walk and think. Do you mind if I leave you behind this morning?"

"Of course not. I've a heap of letters to write. Will you be back for lunch?"

"Don't know. Don't wait for me. Perhaps I'll get some bread and cheese in a pub."

"It's a topping day. Get up on the Trust behind the house. Then drop down on Waterhouses and come found into the Weald. So up to here. That's a grand walk. You've woods and field-paths, or lanes, all the way."

"Thanks. I will. And I'll see if I've an answer for you when I get back."

Dick took his stick in the hall, and an old deer-stalker. He wore a knickerbocker suit and thick brown shoes. Mrs. Mickle saw him go and told Hedge that he was a "fine feller," to be sure.

He climbed the bank on the other side of the lane and found a small track that meandered in and out of undergrowth, bracken, rhododendron clumps, hazel-trees and an occasional cluster of oaks and firs. It was all very lovely, he thought, as he wandered along. For once he was extraordinarily expectant and happy. He searched like a school-boy for early blackberries, and found a few. He hit out at things with his stick. When the bush cleared, he paused to admire the view. He whistled as he went.

But all the while his thoughts ran in a deep under-current. Thirty-five! The years that lay behind stretched away barren and wasted. There were moods when he thought of them as something worse: when the Catholicism he had striven to teach seemed to him an evil thing in its false standards, in its ancient superstitions, in its dead hand on an aspiring world. It had made things so *ugly*, thought Dick—killed laughter, trailed nastiness across some of life's fairest fields, encouraged the worst in men. He hated to think that he had taught it all these years. Hell, Purgatory—he had taught such things to simple animal men who would otherwise have died simply, like stricken beasts. Oh, of course, there had been another side, but— His mind ran on the Sisters' school. Lithe naked little girls had been sent to that school so often and had turned out prudish, giggling, imitation-English women. Yes, and when their own animal native nature had burst through the grave-clothes, he, Dick Thurstan, had reproved and

corrected and held up a crucifix. In a year he had become pagan enough to be sorry for that.

Thirty-five years! School and college and seminary, then parish and mission; and now? He had got to start all over again, to rebuild, to recommence. And he had *nothing* to build upon, no aim, no destination. Dick slashed at a stinging nettle. Almost better to have stayed on.

But it wasn't; he knew it wasn't. One had *got* to be true to what one felt. If one didn't, a cancer formed there and ate the years away. Dick saw that it was no heroic thing he had done, no disinterested one. He had had to go to save his own soul. If he had a soul, which he doubted.

On the top of the reserve, he hesitated. There was open country about him and he looked around. The south was invisible—hidden by the woods he had left. To the north there were signs of a small town; he guessed correctly Waterhouses. To the east he could see a section of main-road, perhaps a couple of miles away, with a purple sheet beyond it of utmost loveliness—willow-herb in bloom. But at his feet forked two paths, one that ran away to the west and was plainly out of count, and one that screwed round, even if it had a northerly direction, and did not look like a path to Waterhouses.

Nevertheless, he took it, since he must, swinging away over stony ground and coarse scrub until it plunged downhill into woods again. They were real woods this time—young oaks and undergrowth out of which elms sprang into the sky and towered overhead. The sunlight dappled their trunks and the blue above rested on their heads. It was an enchanted wood.

Indeed it was. A turn in the path brought him face to face with a girl. Their meeting was utterly abrupt, as if she had come suddenly through a door

into a room, and the path was narrow. He stopped instinctively.

Dick was not one of those wonderful people who would seem to be instantly aware of what colour are a girl's eyes, of what shade her hair and all the rest of it. Fifteen minutes later, if he had been asked, he could have told none of these things. Nor was he so dazzled that he had no intelligence left, which is the explanation sometimes offered for the failure of the wonderful people to come up to scratch. He was just aware that she was a very pleasant-looking girl, with a candid face. Also the rough grey material of her skirt got stuck, somehow, ineffacably in his brain. And then that her eyes laughed at him.

"So it *has* happened," she said.

Dick stared, as well he might. "I beg your pardon," he stammered.

"We've met: I may as well tell you, Mr. Thurstan, that I was dead sure we should. Of course it was likely enough, in one way, and yet two people could live for years within five miles of each other and not meet. Whereas I knew——" She broke off. "I shan't tell what I knew," she said.

There was that in her that made it all familiar and simple. Dick smiled back. With her every word he advanced far into understanding. Yet he knew nothing; he had no explanation. She was an utter stranger. But he smiled back as if she were not.

"How in the world did you know my name? Who are you, anyway?"

"Ann—Ann Carew," she said.

CHAPTER VI

Ann's Intervention

I

Dick was suddenly aware that they were standing rather foolishly opposite one another in the narrow way, in a curious relationship. They were not acquaintances. He could not say: "Good morning, Miss Carew. Nice day, isn't it? How is your father? Yes, I'm just taking a stroll to Waterhouses. You're off to Khamskatka? How jolly! Good-bye." . . . But they were not friends. He couldn't suggest walking with her, or sitting down together. Yet could he not? He realised on the instant that, for some odd reason, he could; and the peculiarity of it held him speechless. But not her.

"Would you mind if we sat down and talked a bit?" she asked.

"Rather not," he replied. "There's a log behind you that might have been arranged for a 'sitting.'"

"I daresay it was." She laughed happily. "Anyway, it will do splendidly."

They made their way to a fallen tree and she sat down upon it. Dick stood for a moment and deliberately surveyed her for the first time. He could not have explained even to himself why he did so impolite a thing, but if it had been suggested to him at that moment that it was impolite he would have been surprised. His thoughts should have surprised him, but they did not. They were odd thoughts for a man who had been a priest all his life—and a strict one, but they did not surprise him for they were unconscious thoughts, instinctive ones, the first instinctive ones Dick had ever had in regard to a woman. Being unconscious thoughts, the part of him that thought them did not communicate them to the

other part, but held them very fast. The conscious Dick merely felt as if it were a very good thing to be alive and as if he were ten years younger. And Ann knew that he felt it, and smiled with relief.

Yet even she did not know that it was with relief that she smiled. Possibly it seems foolish to insist on that and on Dick's unconscious thoughts, but it is not. It is most important. It's the way things happen—sometimes; though only those to whom they have happened understand them when they occur in other people's lives. Ann, indeed, smiled not only with relief. She smiled also with confidence.

"Sit down," she said happily.

"May I? May I smoke? A pipe, I mean."

Ann's face grew grave, but its gravity was belied by the light in her eyes. "Certainly, Mr. Thurstan," she answered, as conventionally as he had asked the question.

At that it struck Dick that it was absurd to be conventional with Ann, and he laughed.

"What are you laughing at?" she demanded, smiling again.

He sat down, made himself comfortable, and got out his pipe. "Look here," he said, "it's up to me, not to you, to ask questions. How in thunder did you know my name? I'm not a cinema star or a criminal."

"I am, though," she said.

"What in the blazes do you mean?" he demanded good humouredly, unfastening his tobacco pouch.

"I'm a criminal. I've been in the papers. Now you *must* know."

"I don't. I don't read the papers."

"You don't know? Lady Ann Carew. You don't know?"

"Sorry, but I don't. I tell you I don't read the papers. What did you do? Forge a cheque? Murder

your husband? But then you would not be at large. Unless—oh, I say, I must tell you a story!”

She leaned forward, surveying him. “Please do,” she said, with a queer tightening in her throat.

“It was at Djibuti—you know, port of French Somaliland. I had an introduction to a fellow and he met the steamer. I’d never seen him before—knew his brother, that was all, and we shook hands conventionally. Then he said: ‘I think I ought to tell you, Thurstan, that I was sentenced yesterday to three months’ imprisonment.’”

Ann chuckled. “What in the world did you say?”

“Exactly. What does one say? I thought of fifty things. ‘My dear fellow, don’t let that worry you’—but then it plainly wasn’t worrying him. ‘Really? A jolly day, isn’t it?’—but then we’d said that. Actually, I was nervous. So I think I merely said: ‘Oh. How do I get my baggage out?’”

“You didn’t say that to me.”

“I haven’t any baggage to get out.”

“No. But you might have asked him what crime he’d committed. You asked me.”

“Yes, but then you see I thought it highly probable that he *had* committed a crime. Whereas, with you——” Dick laughed.

“But I *am* guilty enough,” she insisted. “Do you honestly mean you don’t know?”

Dick cupped his hands and lit a match. Meanwhile her eyes were taking in the detail of him, and noting it—his disordered, rather curly hair; the lines on his forehead; his rather ugly face; his forceful chin; his fair long-fingered hands.

He puffed vigorously. “I—told you—I didn’t read—the papers.” (The pipe drew well.) “Why should I? The only news in them is the personal news of other people who have happened to come before the public

gaze—which I don't want to know, or the opinions of a few millionaire proprietors on such of the events of the day as they think it will aid their circulation or forward their private aims to tell in a garbled fashion. Besides, I'm staying with an old friend and we've had no end of sensible things to talk about."

"At Harker's Orchard? Mr. Linscott, isn't it?"

Dick was genuinely bewildered now. He swung round and looked at her. She met his gaze fairly. "Dash it all," he said, "you've a lot to explain, Lady Carew. I'm beginning to be honestly astonished."

She sobered suddenly. "You needn't be. Listen. You travelled from Port Said to Marseilles on the *City of Benares*, didn't you? So did I. First class, though."

"That doesn't explain much," said Dick. "First class passengers don't get provided with a printed list of third class passengers' names and addresses. Besides——"

She interrupted. "Let me finish. Do you remember that the promenade deck slightly overlapped the deck-space allowed to third class passengers?"

He nodded.

"Well, I didn't make many acquaintances. I didn't want to. I was coming home to a ghastly ordeal and I did a lot of thinking. Especially by night. And once, when they were all at a concert—we were off Messina—I was leaning alone over the rail just above your deck. The sound of the concert was faint in the saloon, and the night was wonderfully still. Two men were talking below me, or at least one was, but too low for what he said to reach me and interfere with my thoughts. And then, suddenly, you spoke. Emphatically. I remember exactly what you said."

"What? Heavens, is this a Judgment Day!"

She did not smile. "You said," she went on evenly: "I can see no authority in Church or State that has any

right to enquire into or to judge the moral affairs of individuals.' That's what you said. Do you remember ? "

"Not word for word. But I recall the occasion. I was talking with a fellow called—er—Edwards about marriage and divorce."

"And right and wrong generally. For I stayed on up there. I couldn't help it. You've got to forgive me. You were saying exactly what I'd longed to hear from somebody else, exactly what I'd felt and never could put into words."

Dick smoked in silence for a while and she did not seem inclined to go on. At last he asked: "But Harker's Orchard and Linscott ? "

"Eventually you began to speak of getting into Marseilles. You said you were going on to Dover and that at Dover you'd wire to a friend of yours living on the borders of Kent, Sussex and Surrey. 'He lives at a place called Harker's Orchard,' you said ; 'isn't it a jolly name ? ' And as I was going to a friend who lived almost on the borders of those three counties also, I was interested, naturally. It narrowed the circle, you see. Then, in the train to Broad Chalke, I happened to meet Mr. Linscott. He didn't tell me his name, but he said he lived at Harker's Orchard. My friends, the Sinclairs, supplied the rest."

She ceased, and Dick laughed. "That's just about all there is of mystery in life," he said. "If you'd offered to cross my palm and had read my hand, you would most certainly have convinced me of magic."

Ann said: "Oh, and a searchlight from Messina showed me your face for a second or two."

Dick changed his position, so that he could look at her as he sat. He studied her gravely for awhile and began consciously to see her face. She had fair bobbed hair

under a simple little hat with a scrap of pheasant's wing in it. She had large Irish eyes. She had firm full lips and clear healthy skin. Her ungloved hands were finely modelled, well proportioned and clasped about her knees as she sat.

"You expected to meet me?" said Dick at last.

She looked at him. Their eyes met again. "Are you surprised?" she demanded.

Dick was immediately conscious of unbounded surprise, such surprise that it fairly took his breath away. He was aware that it seemed to him already as if he had had to meet her. He said nothing, however, immediately, to that, but reverted, presently, to her previous words. "What have the papers been saying about you?" he asked.

"The court said I was guilty of adultery, a morning paper that cases like mine were the scandal of the age and would be the ruin of England. One evening paper had headlines: 'Lady Ann brazens it out.' Last Sunday's *Courier* made a vile story of it. Is that enough?"

"Tell me," said Dick.

She told him, while Dick smoked and watched her face. At last she finished. "So now I'm legally free of him, but it makes no difference. I should not have given myself to Harold in Paris if I had not felt free. That's the first thing I want to ask you. Was I right or wrong?"

Dick weighed his words. "I say," he said, "I've got to tell you something. I was a priest for years. I only jacked out last year. Catholic."

She nodded. "I understand now," she said.

"What do you mean?"

"That was what I knew about you, and couldn't name. It's in your face."

"Do you mean that?" he demanded. "Do I *look* a priest?"

She unclasped her hands and played nervously with a string of painted wooden beads about her neck. But that was the only sign she gave of nervousness. "Frankly, though you may think it silly, you do to me, but not in the ordinary sense. You've the soul of a priest, and of a very honest priest. Not a Catholic only, though. Oh, I can't express it."

Dick filled her silence. "Then you will perhaps understand what I am going to say. If every word of what you have told me is true, then I believe that you did absolutely right. I hate the word 'right'; it means, in ordinary speech, not what I mean. I don't mean 'right' by any standards the world has got set up at present, but I mean 'right' by standards that seem to me the only standards worth having, and standards the world has got to set up before it can be what it ought to be. Before people can be honest and worthy of life and free. But I scarcely know you. I do not know if what you have told me is wholly true. And I know that while you think it is true, you may be deceiving yourself."

"How?"

"Did you *love* Harold?" he asked abruptly.

She flushed and did not reply at once. Then: "I thought I did," she said.

"You see," he replied gravely.

"He was such a boy, and going to his death. I *knew* he was going to his death. I'm half Irish and I know things, sometimes. It was more mothering him than loving him. The physical side of it didn't seem to matter."

"It didn't," replied the priest of Nature in Dick's soul for him, without hesitation, "but did you know that then or later?"

She did not reply, her face set, her eyes cast down.
"You shame me," she said at last.

"I'm sorry. But you wanted the truth. You have no reason to feel ashamed of the truth."

"No. You're right. Not with you."

And once again Dick was conscious of sudden surprise, surprise that what she said should be so incredibly true. To mask it, he half changed the subject. "What else did you want to ask me?" he questioned. "You hinted at something else."

"Yes. There's a very big and immediate thing, and I daresay you'll think it strange that I should come to you about it. But—well, I have. What you said that night at Messina made me feel I could ask you. There's a man wants to marry me." She paused.

"Go on," said Dick.

She lifted her eyes to his face. "First," she said, "he's in Egypt. I've seen him a lot lately. You can guess what people will say if the announcement of our engagement should be made."

"That matters nothing at all," said Dick. "Nothing. But, in point of fact, have you lived with him?"

"No."

"Well, do you want to marry him?"

She hesitated. "I don't know," she said at last.

Dick looked away into the depths of the green woods about them. It seemed to him that a curious stillness reigned in him and about him. Far off he heard the honk of a passing motor as if it belonged to another world. He had, mentally, to pull himself together, to strive after good judgment.

"Does he love you? Tell me about him."

"I think he loves me very much, or—or—I think he thinks he does. I do not understand why I make that difference, really I don't. It seems to me that I know

something about him that I can't put into words. Perhaps—I don't know—it's this. He loves me, but not so that I shall be first in his life. I don't mean he'll neglect me, or put me definitely second, or be unfaithful, but this love of his is—is—a sort of selfish love. He *wants* me. For all sorts of reasons. Physically he wants me. Also he wants children, and a—a—a wife. Oh, I can't express it."

"You express it very well," said Dick. "Lady Carew, there are several sorts of love. . . . Do you love him?"

Again she hesitated. "I—I don't know," she said. "Perhaps it is with me as I think it is with him. I *like* him awfully. He's rich, too, well-educated, a thorough, decent fellow—oh, a fine man all round." She seemed to make up her mind suddenly. "No," she said abruptly, "I don't *love* him like that."

It was on the tip of Dick's tongue to say "Like what?" but he didn't. He understood. So instead he began to try to make her understand, speaking slowly, a little laboriously, as simply as he could.

"Listen. There are at least three sorts of love. First, there's what you can call *instinctive* love, that's merely animal, and none the worse for being animal either. Animals, and the animal in man, are just as pure and honest as the things the Church labels pure. But that sort of love is pure chemistry—a matter for the biological laboratory. It's just sex—something that evolved out of a volvox colony of protozoa—and means hormones going to work, purposive ova, and all the rest of it. Understand?"

"I think I do."

"Well, most normal males and females, thrown together, develop the rudiments of instinctive love, for what it's worth. And it may be worth a good deal. It may be to you and—and——"

"James," supplied Ann, smiling.

"James," said Dick. "Thank you. So much for that. . . . Then there's what you can call *emotional* love. It's human only, perhaps—a result of civilisation. Instinctive love being biased by something more than instinct, so that, biologically, it's often useless. Sometimes the thing shows itself between two people of the same sex; it's cruel harshly to condemn it when it does. We don't understand enough. Maybe *emotional* love is a throw-off on the road up—possibly only to half-animals, half-spirituals like ourselves. See that?"

"Yes. It's the first time I've ever heard it put into words, but it seems to me as if I'd always known. Like two and two making four. Go on."

Dick hesitated. Then he frowned. She noticed it, and laughed as she had not laughed for a long time. It was almost mischievous.

Dick, however, did not notice that. He was staring into the depths of the greenery, and frowning. "Look here," he said at last, "I'm going to say something I don't see. It's like this. I've been telling you a philosophy not my own, or not wholly my own. No, better, if I go on talking, I shall be telling you a philosophy not my own. What I've told you is old—old as the hills—Buddhist largely, and I believe it; but what I ought to add is altogether Buddhist and not mine. . . . They say there is a third thing—*conscious* love."

"Well, why not?"

"Because by conscious love they mean a hundred things of which there is no proof. I've told you I've left the Church. I'm an atheist, or an agnostic, anyway. I am really. I see no basis whatever for belief in a personal God who is concerned with us at all. Personal immortality seems to me a wild guess—we'd like it, or we think we'd like it, and so we say it *is*. But that's

stupid—savage. And even that we have souls—there's no proof. All these years I've gone on suppositions; by God, I won't now! Do you see?"

He did not see how tender her eyes were, being blind for a moment and a man. "Yes," she said.

"Well, they say *conscious* love is a rare, rare thing. They mix it up with other existences and future lives. Wipe that out, and they say, more sensibly, that conscious love differs from emotional or instinctive in that it is primarily altruistic. It does not love for itself; it loves for the other. Its aim is the other's happiness, and—and—perfection. It goes very humbly because we are all so damned ignorant and never really know what is the best for somebody else. But conscious love tries to find out. It will sacrifice itself to please. It's a slow thing—a growth. It includes the physical—it isn't all 'spiritual,' to use that word. It isn't mother-love, or anything like that: that all belongs to the biological laboratory, of course. It's the highest thing there is, and when it comes to people the gods have smiled upon them. Lose it and you lose the best in life. Indeed, *they'd* say more than that. You see it's rare: it is offered to few people. Most of 'em couldn't use it if it came. Not developed enough. Oh, hang it, have the whole dictionary!—their 'Kharma' is not complete. So that when a man and a woman find themselves *consciously* in love, they are near the end of this 'cycle.'" He paused. "Most of which," he added, "may be bosh."

There was a silence between them now which lasted a good while. Ann broke it. "Thanks," she said.

Dick was curious. "What are you going to do?"

"Write to-night to—to James, and tell him it's off."

He was troubled. "I say," he said, "don't decide in a hurry. I'd hate to think I'd mucked things up for you. And for him too. He's a decent chap, you say."

She got up. "He is, and that's why I shall write as I've told you."

Dick, too, got up. He was, all at once, conscious of but one thing, that he had answered what she had asked and that she might now go out of his life as suddenly as she had come into it. He did not want her to go—yet. He could not see anything beyond the desire to hold her longer, to find a reason for not at once saying "Good-bye"; but he could see that.

"I say," he asked like a boy, "what are you going to do now?"

She looked at him frankly. "Nothing particular," she said.

"Have you to be back for lunch?"

She laughed. "You don't know the Sinclairs," she said. "No one ever need be back for anything there. Meals are put upon the table at given hours and remain for a period; then they go, eaten or uneaten. Mildred may say: 'I wonder where Tom is,' and Tom, possibly: 'Good God, Mildred in Town again?' but that's all there is to it. Besides—(she hesitated and a frown swept her face)—oh, well, the Sinclairs are wonderful, and awfully good, but can you understand it's a bit awkward for them having me?"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, if you live in England, however Sinclairishly, England has its say. They've neighbours. Some of them think I've sinned against God. *They* don't count much, I'll admit, but there are others who think I've sinned against *Society*. And *they* count more than Mildred cares to own, let me tell you."

"You poor child," said Dick.

"Twenty-four," laughed Ann.

And then Dick went quite crazy. He caught her by the arm. "Look here," he cried, "what a rag! We'll drop

down into Gadshurst and have lunch in a pub. Bread and cheese and beer. Nobody'll know us. Then I'll wire Aubrey that I won't be in for dinner, and you can wire your Mildred, if you like. We'll take a train to Town, and we'll dine in Soho somewhere, where clothes don't matter. There *used* to be a restaurant that served *crab farcée* fit for the gods—but I expect you know your London better than I. And we'll go to a theatre afterwards, if we can find one. What do you say ? ”

“Glory be to God ! ” said Ann.

“Gosh,” exclaimed Dick, “but wait a tick.” He thrust his hand into his breast-pocket and drew out his note-case. An inquiring thumb and finger produced one Pound note and one Ten Shilling note and fluttered them forlornly. An inquiring hand, thrust into a breeches pocket, produced some loose silver and held it out gingerly. “No can do on that,” he said disappointedly. “Only two quid. You're *Lady Ann*.”

Her eyes shone. “No,” she retorted ; “Ann.”

Dick thrust back his note-case. “Thank heaven I met you,” he cried. “Come on.”

II

A detective, had one such been employed on the job, might have picked up their trail from under a number of witnesses, and have learned a good deal from the series of small impressions that their passing made on these same witnesses. There was, for example, the tramp who was sitting by the side of the main road from Pickworth Hill to Waterhouses, at the base of a steep bank which formed one boundary to Sparshott Woods. Drinking at intervals from a black bottle and munching contentedly at cold mutton and half a loaf, he was suddenly aroused by the breaking of bushes and merry laughter.

"But that's the main road. You vowed we didn't walk on *any* main road," said a man's voice.

"Nor we do. We cross it. See? That gate over there. I'll race you to it," replied the woman's.

"Right. One—two—three—— Off!"

Then a number of things happened practically simultaneously. Two figures descended from the top of the bank in a cloud of dust, fragments of green-stuff, small stones and laughter. The tramp half started up. "Gawd 'elp us——" he began. A man's figure avoided him by inches, but not the black bottle conveniently placed against a hummock of grass. The black bottle went flying. A man and a woman rushed across the road diagonally and fell limply on the gate of the bridle-way that leads across Waterhouses Common to Gadshurst Chart.

"I won!" exclaimed the girl.

"You fibber! You didn't. It was a draw, and I'd have won if I hadn't kicked something. I nearly fell."

"'Ere, mister. Hi! 'Scuse me, laidy. The gennelman's kicked hover my bottle of water."

The "gennelman" glanced back. "Great Scott, I might have cut myself on that fellow's luncheon beer! I say, doesn't the very bottle make you thirsty?"

The tramp was crossing the road. "'Ere, mister—beg your pardon, mister—I'm a pore out-o'-work——"

"Sorry, my man. Here's a bob. Get some more water at the next pub."

A shilling flew through the air and fell in the road. The girl had already climbed the gate. The man vaulted over. A fragment of comment floated back to the tramp: "Extravagance! That leaves only thirty-nine! *You'll* have to go without a——"

And silence fell on the dusty road, leaving a dirty

tramp in the middle thereof aware of a shining shilling, but staring open-mouthed at a white gate.

A postman, pushing a bicycle in the heart of the woods known as Summer Spinney, came on two persons consulting where three paths met. At least the man, drawing a pipe from his pocket, could hardly be described thus, for the postman overheard him say: "Well, it's up to you. You *ought* to know. I'll smoke while you think it out."

And she: "It's so confusing. Oh—I'll ask."

The postman reached them. The man, filling his pipe, looked very content; the girl, fresh and exceedingly pleasing. "Could you tell me," she asked politely, "which is the path to Gadshurst? I want the one that comes out on the Waterhouses—Kniveton Road, where you cross over and take another path to the village?"

"Yes, mum," replied the postman. "This 'ere that I'm on. It's a short cut—not more'n ten minutes to the road."

"Thank God," said the man. "Say fifteen to a drink."

"'Ot day, sir," remarked the postman genially.

"It is. You got far to go?"

"A pretty bit. 'Arf-way to Bridgeford. I best be pushing on. Good-day, sir. Good-day, mum."

And in the witness-box he could have been induced to testify on oath that, as he rounded the bend, the man said: "Well, let's get on, Ann."

The landlady at the *King's Arms*, Gadshurst, would have been almost too voluble for the average detective. Besides, like witnesses to more important affairs before and since, she would have been forced to have drawn too largely on her imagination to be altogether reliable. Still, "a very nice couple" had come in about twelve o'clock. Right into the bar. The girl was a "real lady,

anybody could see, from the way she had with her." The gentleman had asked for bread and cheese and beer, a "funny" gentleman, too, because when she had volunteered a round of beef, a salad and some pickles, he had said: "Excellent. Couldn't be better. But, you see, the question is: could I pay for it? Exactly how much, now, would beef, salad, bread, cheese and pickles be?"

"Butter," interjected the girl.

"Yes, and butter?"

The landlady told him that she always charged 'arf-a-crown a 'ead for lunch, eat what you please. Beer h'extra, of course.

Then the gentleman had turned excitedly on the lady. "Five bob! I believe we can do it. That is—if—do you drink *much* beer?"

The lady had said not much, and the gentleman had wondered if, then, one bottle might not do between them?

And the lady: "Oh, shut up, Dick. • I'm dying of hunger. *I've* got some money. If you talk longer I'll call for—for cider!"

"Don't keep no cider," said the landlady.

They both laughed. "Besides," said the gentleman, "could I on this day drink *your* cider? But out of my penury you shall share *my* beer."

Then she had shown the couple to the parlour, and gone out, discreetly closing the door. Maggie had taken in the tray. When she entered, neither had shown any signs of rapid movement apart, but still they were both sitting on the sofa, not saying much. • Maggie was quite sure they were a "couple." She said the lady was awfully pretty, though she wore no "joolery." And the landlady had said to Maggie that "real ladies didn't wear their diamints and pearls much by day." And—

interminably, if allowed. For they had been a *very* pleasant couple, admiring the flowers in the little garden and asking for a time-table of the trains to London from Broad Chalke so very friendly-like. Finding one up at two-fifteen, they had lingered over their meal, sat a bit in the garden, bought two picture-postcards at the village shop, and left, for the twenty minutes walk to Broad Chalke station, at about a quarter to two.

Broad Chalke could have deposed to the purchase of two third returns to Town in an orderly and mathematical manner, to the despatch of two in substance identical telegrams: "Gone to Town. Back last train. Have arranged taxi. Don't meet," and to the fact that nobody noticed the two strangers particularly. Broad Chalke had a fair passenger traffic. Broad Chalke, however, could not have testified to the glee of the two third returns on discovering that, during midday hours, the fare was less, and probably did not notice that, in consequence, the gentleman purchased for the lady a penny packet of chocolate from the automatic machine. "I haven't eaten chocolate like this since I was a girl," said Ann.

"Not long ago," said Dick.

"Ages," replied Ann, "before I was married. The year before, to be precise. I was seventeen and the War had just begun. Do you remember all the French and Belgian pennies there were about? Francis and I used to collect them from the officers we knew coming back from the Front, and use them on the Tube stations' penny-in-the-slot machines."

"Who was Francis?"

"My brother. Sixteen then. He went out in 1918. He was killed."

"Hard luck. Any other brothers?"

"No. It *was* hard luck. We had awful fun together,

and he understood how I hated marrying. I've two other sisters though, kids, by Dad's second wife. My mother died when I was seven. She was a dear. You'd have loved her. Daddy—well, I never saw much of Daddy. He was in the F.M.S., and later on in Burma almost all the time. He came home on leave with my step-mother and Doris and Ethne when I was fourteen or so, but he couldn't leave his job to get home for my marriage, though he urged it on me by letter. Lord Carew was a friend of his. He never got to Europe for the War, though he tried hard, and he died in the epidemic."

"So you've only your step-mother and two half-sisters?"

"Who don't count. Mother hates me. She thinks that anybody who disgraces herself in Society ought to be cut dead. And I've disgraced myself horribly. Not only by the divorce, but by refusing to go to parties and to meet people. By running off to Egypt and South Africa, too. Oh, I'm '*Ann*.' You should just hear mother say it. 'I would rather not discuss Ann,' " she mimicked.

Dick frowned. "I can't understand a mother like that."

"Well, after all, she is not really my mother."

"No. I suppose not. But hasn't anybody ever mothered you?"

"Yes. Aunt Helen. She looked after Francis and me till I was fourteen and he thirteen, and I'm afraid we led her an *awful* dance. Not that I ever *meant* to be bad. Do you know, since then, I've been exceedingly sorry for myself. Aunt Helen was a dear, but she didn't understand children. She was very religious and very strict and very unimaginative. I can see that now. So, for instance, when they had just painted the gate beautifully white, and I found some red paint and painted

AUNT HELEN'S HOUSE with it all across the top bar, she was fearfully angry. I was whipped and sent to bed. But I was only nine and didn't mean to spoil the gate."

"You poor kid!"

"And I was always leading Francis into scrapes, too. Once, on the sands at Boscombe, we dressed up as niggers and gave an entertainment to collect money for Daddy's Christmas present—we had to begin early, you see, as he was in Burma. That was my idea, and Francis looked *splendid*. He was fair-haired and he had a jolly voice. We collected lots, but our governess found us out and nearly had a fit. I was whipped for that, too."

"Don't," said Dick. "I hate to hear you. Besides, there's the train."

Thus they were lost in London.

III

It was half-past midnight when they stood again on Broad Chalke station platform, and a lovely night. The stars shone clear in a perfect sky. There was a little wind blowing, and the car they had ordered stood waiting for them. It was open, and they climbed into it with few words. "Penscott Hall, Waterhouses," ordered Dick.

"Yes, sir," said the man.

Dick sat in one corner looking straight before him, and Ann in the other, but so that she could surreptitiously watch his face. Dick's mind was in a whirl; her's fairly tranquil. She had the advantage of him, in a sense, being not a little fey. Besides, she had really learnt more of him than he of her that day. She saw with strangely clear vision into his mind, sensed its turbulence, wondered only if he would be strong enough to let Fate

take its course. The religious side of him, however, she could not estimate; it was as if, beyond a certain depth, a bank of fog rolled over his soul which she could not penetrate. She did not wish to do so, either; she was too happy. Or nearly happy. She would have found it difficult to say what the state was in which she found herself. Apprehension was there, but rather for him than for her—lest he miss the way; a dim sense of foreboding that she knew to be mystical and did not waste time contemplating; relief, that they had really, honestly, by chance, met; and, more immediately, sorrow that in ten minutes or so, at this rate, a wonderful day would be over.

At last she spoke—mischievously. "What was that savoury, Dick?"

"Angels on horseback." He turned his head quickly and eagerly, like a boy. "Did you like them?"

She nodded. And dared. "Could we have them next time?"

He laughed excitedly. "No, not next-time. I know what we'll have next time already. But I shan't tell you yet. Angels on horseback heaps of times later, perhaps, but not next."

Her heart leaped a little. He *was* a boy. She was far older than he, in a way. He took it for granted, indeed, that there would be a next time! And then, suddenly, she realised that he took far more for granted than that, and the realisation of it had her by the throat. Tears gathered in her eyes. Yet he had said nothing whatever to warrant them all day. They had just been playmates.

"I say, how did it go? I've forgotten. I've a bad memory for verses. 'If the heart of a man is—is——'"

She smiled in the dark, and leaned forward, humming:

"If the Heart of a Man is deprest with Cares,
The Mist is dispell'd when a Woman appears ;
Like the Notes of a Fiddle, she sweetly, sweetly
Raises the Spirits, and charms our Ears.

Roses and Lilies her Cheeks disclose,
But her ripe Lips are more sweet than those ;
Press her,
Caress her,
With Blisses
Her Kisses

Dissolve us in Pleasure, and soft Repose."

He sighed with happiness. "Yes, that's it. . . . I say, I'd love to hear you sing. . . . But wasn't it just topping ?"

"Topping."

"I shall never forget it," he said, and turned his head away.

She leaned back in silence, not disappointed, but delighted that he should say so little, do nothing, refrain from the slightest caress. All other men, she told herself proudly, would have made love to her, but he had not. She liked him for that. Memories of adventures in France, not all of them pleasant, thronged her, and she was glad this was so different. Yet—yet—in five minutes . . .

"Listen." He was speaking again, with that intense note in his voice which she had come already to distinguish in him. "There are a thousand things I want to say to you, but I can't. I've hardly told you anything about myself—not about the real *me*, I mean. I daresay it's cheek to suppose you'd want to hear, but I don't think it is. I think you've got to hear. And I propose to write to you to-night and to post it to-morrow. I shall say just what's in my mind. May I ?"

She could but nod her head and hope he would not see the tears in her eyes.

"Well," the eager voice went on, "will you do the same by me? Will you write to-night—no, not to-night, you'll be tired, but to-morrow, just what's in *your* mind? Just exactly what's in your mind, no matter what it is, and post it to me? Our letters'll cross then. You see why?"

"Perhaps. Tell me."

"I can hardly tell you. It would give what I feel away. I think it may be the same with you as it is with me, in your heart that is, and if so——" He hesitated. Then: "I *WON'T* say any more. It *would* give it away. You will?"

"I will, Dick"

He threw himself back and looked away from her. "Thanks," he said abruptly, over his shoulder. There were two or three feet of cushion between them, she noticed with amusement. He did not even attempt to sit near her. Her heart sang with amazed happiness. They drove on through the dark.

Up a short hill, round by the village pond in which shone stars, and down the wide old-fashioned village-street. "The Crown and Garter" gleamed in the soft light. There were no lights visible anywhere. "In two minutes we shall be there," she said.

That woke him, as it were. He sat up and turned to her, looking about him. "Is this Waterhouses? Two minutes only? Ann, I never can thank you enough."

"It's I who have to thank you. Have you forgotten that you answered my two questions?"

"One. I wasn't sure of the other."

"You've answered both, completely."

They looked into each other's eyes for a few seconds

in silence, each meeting the other fearlessly. "What a day, and what a night!" he said at last.

The taxi slowed down. "Shall I drive in, sir?" the man asked.

Dick looked at Ann questioningly.

Ann answered for him. "No, thanks. It's only a minute or two to the house, and a narrow turn. I can easily walk."

"Right, miss." The cab stopped.

Dick opened the door and got out, turning to give her his hand. "Let me walk up with you," he said.

"No, thanks. I want to go alone." They stood face to face with each other.

She was just about his own height—an inch shorter, perhaps. She seemed to him exactly right—graceful, strong, contained, and yet—yet—— All about them was the scent of nicotiania, blooming in the night in a bed within the open gates. He held out his hand and she took it. She made no attempt to withdraw it or to shake hands conventionally, but they neither of them noticed that then. So they stood a minute, the driver forgotten.

"Oh, I could talk and talk," he cried at length, "but I won't, I won't! Good-night. I would not have believed that my life could have held such a day."

Ann felt suddenly very weary. "Go now," she said. "Good-night."

He smiled into her eyes, but she did not smile. A long, long road she had travelled, but here was an end. Whether there was another before her or not was his to decide. That was all.

He dropped her hand, and turned away conventionally for a moment to speak to the driver. "Do you know Harker's Orchard? At the top of Pickworth Hill? You turn down a private lane to reach it."

"Yes, sir. Mr. Linscott lives there, don't 'e, sir? I've driven 'im once or twice."

"That's the place." He turned back to Ann, his hand on the door. "Good-night," he said again, "and ever so many thanks." She nodded.

He jumped in and closed the door. The silence of the night was broken again by the rattle of the machine. He waved his hand. He was gone. Ann turned and walked slowly up the drive of Penscott Hall.

As she expected, the French windows of the library stood open for her, and she entered, switched on the light, and closed the doors behind her. She looked round her as if she found herself in a strange place by contrast with a familiar one she had just left. There were sandwiches on a tray, and a whisky decanter. She poured herself out a drink as she ate one. Dick had spent his last shilling on chocolates at Hammersmith and his last sixpence on Tube fares. He wouldn't borrow any for supper. Besides, there hadn't been time for supper. She was quite hungry.

As she ate she wandered about the room, seeing nothing, or perhaps seeing everything beneath the surface on which her gaze outwardly rested. She stood for a long time before a picture that went back and back and back down her road, back to a little girl in a nightgown with thick fair hair who played on a nursery rug in front of a blazing fire and said to her doll, gravely: "I like you, but you're only a doll, you know. One day I'll have a baby of my own." She moved to a bookcase and ran her eye over titles, seeing no books but days, flitting days, in France, in London, in Africa, in the Mediterranean. She turned and stared out into the room, and stood motionless a minute. Then she spoke, aloud, if in a whisper. "He's come, Francis," she said.

At that, at the sound of her voice, she shivered a little

and came to herself. She smiled enigmatically, crossed over and finished her whisky, picked up an electric torch that lay by the tray, flashed it on and turned off the light. "Good servants in this house," she said to herself.

Up the stairs, along a passage, and she was in her room. The door closed softly behind her. For a second she stood there, listening. No one appeared to have been aroused. The windows were wide open and the night air streamed in. Outside the lawns lay lovely in the starlight. There was a fragrance of roses on the night.

She switched up her light, and the night fled. She crossed the floor to a bathroom door, entered it and turned on warm water. Then, quickly, she took off her hat, slipped out of her costume and sighed with relief in her flimsy underclothing as the cool air reached her body. At her mirror she took up her comb and began to brush her hair. But not for long, for after a minute she leaned forward and surveyed herself in the glass. Then, deliberately, she slipped the chemise off her shoulders, and the silk vest beneath. So she sat awhile, surveying herself.

At length, just as she was, Ann opened a drawer in the dressing-table and drew out a small writing-block and pencil. She wrote but a dozen words or so, signed herself "Ann," replaced it, and closed the drawer. Then she went to her bath.

IV

While she wrote, Dick in the taxi sped homewards. His mood had changed suddenly when he found himself alone. He would have been hard put to it to account for that change, but it was real enough. He was utterly exultant; he could have shouted, have sung. The trees against the stars had an exquisite beauty he had never

known before. The white road flashed up ahead of him like an animate thing, leaping in its strength and happiness. He felt as if the very stars shone for him, as if the dark shared his secret, as if the whole world were alive with understanding. "Ann," he kept saying to himself, "Ann—Ann—Ann."

His thoughts exulted within him. "God, I've never lived till to-day. But this isn't being 'in love.' It's something much more. . . . It's a revelation. She's mine, *mine*. She always has been mine. . . . Don't be a fool, my boy. . . . I'm not a fool. It's the one fact in the universe. Nothing else matters. Ann and I have met. After all these years. Ann and I.

"In one day, that's the glorious thing about it. It's utterly fantastic, perhaps because it's true. Perhaps the truth is fantastic. It's preposterous. PREPOSTEROUS. But it's TRUE. Ann and I have met—after all these years. . . .

"Just when I'm really free. It's utterly wonderful. I don't want God now, nor religion, nor anything. No, that's not true. Nothing MATTERS, that's it. Ann. Ann and I. That's all."

"Road to the left, driver," he cautioned. "I say, isn't it a topping night?"

"Very fine, sir. We're in for a fine spell, I think."

"Hope so. Damned narrow lane this. I say, what would you say if I told you I hadn't a cent in my pockets?"

The man smiled. "I don't think that matters much, sir. You're staying with Mr. Linscott, aren't you? I'll book it to him, sir, if you like."

Dick laughed. "How desperately dull!" he said. "I hoped you'd be visibly alarmed. But I don't think we'll book it to Mr. Linscott. He mightn't like it. I've got the cash in my bedroom, though I have spent all I had in my pocket."

"Just as you like, sir. That's the gate, isn't it?"

"Yes. You can turn a hundred yards on, where the road widens. Then wait, will you? I'll be back in a second with the cash."

"All right, sir, thank you."

Dick slipped out and hurried up the little path. Under the clematis he stopped a moment: there was a light in the hall. He entered quietly, but not so quietly that Aubrey did not hear. He came out of the library almost at once, a book in his hand, wearing the big glasses he used for reading.

"My dear fellow, where in the world have you been? Whatever called you to Town?"

Dick advanced merrily, his eyes alight with fun. "Such a spree, Aubrey, old dear. I say, have you got a quid on you? Spent all I had and the rest's upstairs. Taxi's waiting!"

"Yes, I think I have." Aubrey's hand went to his breast-pocket. "One pound, did you say? Here it is." He held out the note.

"Thanks," said Dick, and darted off with it.

Aubrey advanced to the table and put down his book, his spectacles following. Then he lifted the lid off the cheese-dish and peered within. Satisfied, he replaced it and glanced at the salad and the sardines. With an eye he appraised a cupboard in the distance, made up his mind and crossed to it. He was getting out the sherry as Dick re-entered.

"Well, tell me all about it. What have you been up to?"

Dick tossed his cap on to a chair. "Three guesses, Aubrey, though it's not fair to let you. What, sherry? *The* sherry? Oh, wonderful end to a wonderful day!"

Aubrey set out two glasses and removed the cork.

"Well, you're excited enough," he said. "Been looking up somebody?"

"We lunched at Gadshurst and caught the two-fifteen to town. We had tea in Piccadilly, and dined at a top-hole little place in Soho. I forget the name. Then we went to *The Beggar's Opera*, and just caught the last train home. I rather wish we'd missed it. No, I don't not this time."

"We?" asked Aubrey, pouring carefully. "Who was with you?"

"Ann," said Dick, "Lady Ann Carew. Ever heard of her?"

CHAPTER VII

Recognition

I

IN the heart of that stretch of country known as the National Trust, is an open hill with a seat on the top of it beneath a few wind-tormented trees. Paths, winding from several directions through the hazel-growths, give, finally, on this open space which is, perhaps, but two hundred yards across and of slight elevation above the surrounding woods. Slight as it may be, it is an elevation. From that seat the whole wide Weald can be seen—Aubrey's view, in short, yet even bigger. The woods engulf Harker's Orchard from this standpoint, with the lane that leads to it as well, but from Harker's Orchard Pickworth Hill itself is out of sight. From the top of the open knoll, however, the Hill—road, village and church—appear to be at one's feet.

Dick and Ann had agreed upon the knoll as their second place of meeting. It was wholly given over to

the rabbits and the birds on all but Saturday afternoon and Sunday, and even on those days, few climbed to it. The cars and motor-cycles from South London either passed the National Trust on their way to further delights, or did but creep to a side of the road and leave the main tracts free.

Rather less than a week, then, from their first encounter they came deliberately to their second. Their first letters had crossed between them as arranged; their second had chosen and confirmed this second meeting.

It was a day of wind. Great cloud-masses were collecting to the west on the Surrey hills and advancing in steady order across the sky of Kent. You could see them come up over West Chilham, reinforced by skirmishers from Chipping Wold, top the rise and then sweep forward majestically in the direction of Bridgeford. Little winds tore in and out of the woods and united to bear down on any exposed clumps, as if they had been detached by order of the High Command which was directing the advance aloft.

Ann was a few minutes before time. She wanted to be first at the seat, to see Dick emerge from the woods and come to her. But she was not early enough. It was he who watched her climb to him from the opening in the encircling green that led to Waterhouses. The wind pressed her frock about her and she bent a little to meet it. One hand held her hat to her head: her skirt, reaching but little below her knees, had occasionally to be pulled free to allow her to progress. He saw that she was strong, and was glad.

Dick descended a few paces to greet her and once again they confronted each other on a narrow path. But this time it was open country all about them and the grasses of the field bending in the wind. Little shadows raced across the hill. They were quite alone.

Ann met his gaze, laughing. "What a wind!" she cried.

Dick smiled a little, but not much. He was so hungry for her. He just took her in his arms without a word of other greeting and drew her to him. "Oh, Ann, my darling," he said thickly. "Is it true?"

She looked up at him as he gathered her to him, her Irish eyes searching his, her lips a little parted, herself unafraid. Within, she was one wild ecstasy, rejoicing as his passion swept through her, as he forgot his strength, as she felt her breasts crushed to his chest and the tightening of his arms about her waist and back. Without, her complete candour seemed to give her calm. "Dick, sweetness," she whispered, and felt his lips fasten thirstily on hers.

The seconds passed and they still stood there, he searching her face and kissing her again and again. The thoughts flickered like summer lightning in her mind. He was big and tender; he was passionate, but restrained; she could trust him—absolutely, though it would have made no difference if she could not have done so. She had to give herself to him, though he took her and drained her of life and threw her away. It was fore-ordained. Yet he would not: he would be always courteous. But—ah, if giving herself could efface the lines on his face, could somehow reach behind and tear down that veil of sadness and despair that she could sense behind his eyes, how gladly would she give! He was like a worried child, she thought, man though he was. He was greater than she and always would be: at war, always, with the infinite, with strange tearing powers of thought that were not for her; but for all that, he was just a child, a baby. She had it in her, the weaker of the two, to laugh at and to defeat the powers he grappled with. Yet he had it in him to lift her from the dark

waters in which she struggled, to set them at naught. And always, always, it had been so. They two, just they two. . . .

Dick freed her a little and held her at arm's length. Laughter bubbled up in him. "So that's that, Ann," he said, smiling. "Ah, well." He sighed contentedly, and drew her to him again for one kiss that was, she knew, proprietary, sealing. Then he took her arm. "And now, you wonderful person, let's go and sit on that seat and see if we can find any reason in all this black business."

They sat down, hand in hand. "Ann," he said, staring at her, "do you realise how incredibly wonderful this is?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know," she replied. "Yes—I suppose I do, in a way. But not in another."

"But, we've only met once before! By chance, too. Honestly, that was no put-up game? It was all just what you said?"

"Just, Dick."

"And now, you *love* me? Me, Dick Thurstan? Honestly?"

"Honestly, Dick."

"But, Ann, my darling, do you *mean* that? Do you mean you would marry me—give yourself to me body and soul, for ever? You don't know me! I might be a blackguard! I am a——"

She interrupted. "Stop, Dick. Do you *love me*?"

He smiled and did not at once reply. (That was like him. She knew at once, already, what he was at—turning the idea over in his absurd dear mind instead of answering impulsively.) Three great planes appeared low over the tree-tops, buzzed overhead and careered off into the void. He waited till the sound of their passing had died

away. Then : " I don't know," he said. " I suppose so. But, Ann, this seems so much *greater* than love. This—this is just incredible, preposterous. It seems to me that—oh, I don't know how to put it ! It seems to me that—that—well, that we're married already, that there's nothing more to do or say. It seems to me that we might just as well get up and go away together now. It—it—" he stopped. " Honestly, it's beyond words, beloved," he said.

" Sweetness"—the title seemed to him unusual and he utterly loved it—" that is exactly what I feel," she said, " except that—that—oh, Dick, don't *ever* let me down ! You're God to me. It's just a miracle. You've stepped right into my life as if always the place had been there for you, but don't disappoint me, don't fail me ! Everything's failed me up to now ; promise, Dick, *you* won't !"

He dropped her hand and half turned away. " That's just it," he said. " I fear I shall. I doubt I'm any use to you, darling. You'd better stop this right here and never see me again. And yet"—and he turned back fiercely—" I can't let you go, I can't, I can't !"

" Explain, Dick," she said, gently.

" I don't know that I can—that's the worst of it," he replied. " You see it's like this, Ann—you've got to try to understand, to take me on trust. You see I've been a priest, and not a priest as perhaps you think of a—a clergyman. God has been utterly and altogether first in my life. See how that applies to women. I don't say I've never known temptation as we used to call it, and once I thought I was altogether in love with a woman. Heavens, that was an awful time ! On board ship, going to South Africa ! I, a priest, and she, a slip of a thing, all but making me forget my vows when she laughed at me !"

"Poor Dick," whispered Ann.

"Ah, but it wasn't 'Poor Dick' in a way. I was stronger. I KNEW I belonged to God. *He* came first. I never questioned it. And—and—I'd forgotten her in a fortnight! Suppose I do that with you?"

"Why should you?"

"Why should I? Because, perhaps, you won't be able to hold me, not even you, Ann, wonderful as you are! God will come in again, or my thoughts about God. That's better, for I don't believe there is a God now at all. But that's the way I'm made—always thinking about that sort of thing, dedicated to it against my will, if you see what I mean. Oh Ann, Ann, if you could only hold me! If I could anchor in you! If I could only forget those terrible arguments and questions that agonise me, if I could get away from it all—— You, *you* might do it. Will you try? Will you let me worship you, Ann?"

Ann leaned forward and took one of his hands. She lifted it to her lips and kissed it.

Dick almost tore it away. "You mustn't do that!" he cried. "That's what I want to do to you! I'm not worthy that you should do such a thing to me, beloved." And he flung his arms about her and kissed her again.

A little later, Dick put her from him himself. "Listen," he said. "Let's be absolutely reasonable and practical." (Ann smiled secretly.) "My point, in fact, is just this: Here am I, with the training and mind of a priest, and, if I no longer believe the old faith, the big thing with me still is to find out about Truth. I don't want to say 'God,' for I don't believe in Him. But Truth—the meaning of things, the reason for them. What is life worth if it's not to unravel that? Can you see? I can't.

"And yet, Ann, bang on top of that come *you*, and

you've worked a miracle in me right away. All that I've just been saying—my darling, do you realise that it is much more what I feel I *ought* to say rather than what I feel now? Frankly, you've simply turned my head. I seem to care only for you. You just block up my horizon. Do you see, Ann?"

The man's voice was almost wistful, and Ann knew herself very near to tears. "Dick," she said, "if that is so, I'm just yours. Take me, and, if it ever comes to that, if I'm ever in the way, throw me on one side. When you feel you must, I mean. I'll go. If you find—find—Truth."

He was so long silent that she dared at last to look at him. He was staring away into the distance and at the clouds on the far hills. But he sensed her look and turned to her, standing up. She got up too, and he held out his arms.

"Ann, little Ann," he said, "I never expected to hear anything like that. *That's* love that passeth understanding, and yet—yet, it's love I can understand. I never knew there was such love possible in the world. Shall we take each other on those terms, little Ann?"

The tears brimmed over then. She couldn't help it. He gathered her to him. "Oh, Ann, have I made you cry? Oh, my darling, what is it? What have I said?"

II

There followed, later on, a long day on the river for the discussion of ways and means and plans, most of which were of little importance beside the salient fact: Ann and Dick proposed to go away together. The basis of their decision was the simple one sufficiently disclosed already: they were in love with each other. But a great deal more supported it: that they were both at loose

ends; that both, for separate reasons, had done with conventional living; that each saw in the other an almost inevitable step forward on the road of life. That other people would not see their conduct in that light was a small matter.

However, the announcements were of interest. Ann made hers to the Sinclairs the day following the river excursion, after dinner. Her friends knew of her meeting with Dick, and they knew of the previous day's boating, but it had naturally meant nothing more to them than another "flirtation" on the part of Ann. They were accustomed to her vagaries, and to Sinclair and his wife anything that involved the opposite sex was naturally a "flirtation." That Ann, possibly to her sorrow, was the last person in the world to flirt, never entered their heads. If it had, they would have dismissed the idea as ridiculous. Of course, a girl like Ann had her flirtations. . . .

Anyway, they were sitting under a great cedar on the lawn of Penscott Hall. It was still fairly light, and very peaceful. The birds were turning in and sleepily saying good-night. No sounds came up to them from the village. Occasionally there was movement in the stables, but that was all.

Colonel Sinclair was smoking a cigar in a steamer-chair. Mildred, by a table spread with coffee cups and liqueur glasses, was straining her eyes in an attempt to skim the evening paper. Ann lay on a rug on the lawn, a pile of cushions under her head, her eyes fixed on a first star just visible above the towering beech-trees that shut off the lake of the Manor House below the gardens.

Said Mildred: "There's nothing in the paper, as usual. Why ever do we buy evening papers?"

Said Ann: "Then, if you've finished reading, Mildred,

and seeing Tom is here too, I may as well tell you that I'm going abroad again."

"The deuce you are," said the Colonel, "and where to this time?"

"Greece, eventually."

"Good God!"

"With whom, dear?" queried Mildred, mildly interested, "and why Greece? Really, Ann, you do choose the oddest places!"

Ann smiled. "Why should it be odd to go to Greece? I thought Tom, at any rate, prided himself on his classical education!"

"All right," said the Colonel, "go to Greece, then, but don't say I didn't warn you. I wasn't at Salonica for nothing. Modern Greece is inhabited exclusively by fleas and robbers. I give you a week."

"Oh, I think we shall be there considerably longer than a week!"

"But whom are you going with, Ann, dear?" asked Mildred placidly.

"Dick," said Ann.

The Colonel sat up violently. "What!"

Mildred leaned back in her seat. "My dear Ann! You are not serious, of course."

Ann did not move. "I'm more serious than I've ever been in my life," she said. "I'm very grateful to you two dears for taking me in as you have done and for putting me up, but I couldn't, in any case, stay here for ever. That's not the point, however. Dick and I are very much in love, and we're going off together."

"I never heard of such a thing," began the Colonel. "Good God, Ann, you——"

"That'll do for the moment, Tom," interrupted his wife cheerfully. "Let's get to the bottom of this first. I expect there's more in it than meets the eye."

So I suppose you really met this man in Egypt, my dear ? ”

“ No, Mildred,” Ann replied, “ I didn’t. I met him for the first time the other day. But you see, Dick and I have just found each other. We don’t want to waste any more time.”

Mildred sat up. She was becoming slightly alarmed. “ You don’t mean you’re going off with a man you’ve only met three times in your life ! ”

“ Yes. That’s exactly it.”

“ She’s mad—stark, staring mad ! ”

“ Tom, that’ll do. But, Ann, my dear, you don’t mean—— Oh, this is incredible ! After all you’ve gone through, too. Good heavens, haven’t you had enough of matrimony for awhile ? ”

“ We’re not going to get married. You see, we neither of us think much of marriage. Besides, of course we *may* be mistaken. We may not get on so well together as we think.”

That was too much for the Colonel. “ Damme, Ann,” he cried, “ this is going a bit too far. The fellow wants horsewhipping. A common adventurer ! Think, since you’ve been through the Divorce Court——”

Ann was on her feet. “ Another word, Tom, and I walk out of this house to-night. You’re an old friend and you’ve the devil of a temper, but you’ve no right to insult me.”

Mildred tried to pour oil on the troubled waters. “ Tom, *do* be quiet. She’s right : you’ve no right to say such things. Ann, sit down, there’s a dear. Let’s discuss it reasonably. What, actually, are your plans ? ”

Ann’s anger faded swiftly away. She glanced from the mortified face of the Colonel to the troubled one of his wife. Then she smiled, and sat down in a favourite position of hers, clasping her hands about her knees.

"Well," she said, "I suppose it is a bit startling. You're so stolid and conventional, really, you two. But I've already told you practically all our plans, Mildred. We catch the boat train on Wednesday week for Paris first. That's about all there is to it. But in Paris, together, we shall look into the sailings of the Messageries Maritimes from Marseilles for the Near East. They've an excellent service to Piræus. Once a month, I think."

There was a little silence as she finished. Her tone suggested it. She had an air of finality.

The Colonel broke it, plainly holding himself in. "You've told your mother, I suppose?"

"No. Of course not. Why should I?"

Said Mildred: "But, my dear, be reasonable. Who is this Dick Thurstan? Who knows him? You're young, Ann, and impressionable. He may easily turn out—er—not to be—er—quite a gentleman."

"Thanks," said Ann, "but I think I know a gentleman when I meet one."

"But who is the fellow?" demanded the Colonel, catching at his wife's cue.

Ann determined to hide nothing. "A year ago he was a Catholic priest in South Africa," she said. "He comes of an old Catholic family."

Tom was on his feet. "By God, Ann," he cried, "you're mad—stark, staring mad!"

"You've said that before," said Ann, sweetly.

"I don't care a damn if I have. I'll say it again. Stark, staring mad. A renegade Catholic priest! A Catholic! And you sit there and tell me——" He mastered himself with difficulty. "Well, my young woman, I write to your mother to-night. And Sir Theodore into the bargain. You ought to be in a lunatic asylum."

The colour mounted to Ann's cheeks, but she did not

move. "One moment, Tom," she said. "You can, no doubt, write both those letters, but if you do you'll never see or hear from me again. Also you know as well as I do that neither my step-mother nor my old guardian can do anything. I'm of age. I'm divorced. I'm free. They could not stop me going to South Africa, and they cannot stop me going to Greece. Alone, or with Dick, as I please."

"But they can make the hell of a row about it. They can enquire into this fellow's past. Why was he sacked, I should like to know? A woman? Good God, Ann——"

"Tom," began his wife.

Ann interrupted. "One moment, Mildred. Tom, don't be quite a fool. Do you think mother would welcome another newspaper story? And do you think I should fall in love with a priest who had been sacked, as you delightfully put it, on account of a woman? Yet——"

She lapsed into silence. She knew, on the instant, that it would make no difference to her if Dick had been "sacked" on account of a woman. Still, Tom wouldn't understand that and there was no necessity to tell him so.

Tom caught at her hesitation. "Why did he go, then?" he demanded triumphantly, scenting her hesitation.

"He left of his own free will because he could not in honour go on. He had ceased to believe their Faith."

"A likely story! The sort of thing he would say. And what proof have you got of it, anyway?"

"I believe him," said Ann quietly.

Tom Sinclair gestured with his hands to the peaceful world about them. He was eloquent in his gesture. It even gave him a sort of satisfaction, and he sat down heavily. "Well," he said, "count me out. I'm done."

It's beyond me. But what the country's comin' to, God knows."

"That's better, dear," said his wife cheerfully. "You stick to that. The country always relieves you. Meantime, I think we've wandered a bit from the point. Excuse me, Ann dear, but has this young gentleman any money?"

"Enough to go on with," said Ann, non-committally.

"But, dear, you know, now, you've nothing much yourself. About a couple of hundred a year, isn't it? I thought one of your problems was money. You know you can hardly dress on what you've got."

("Dress!" from the steamer-chair. "Won't keep her in stockings and *lingerie* if I know anything about it. Or perhaps you won't wear underclothes in Greece. I believe the women mostly don't.")

Mildred threw him a glance and Ann said nothing. Her friend pressed her. "Do be a *little* practical, Ann."

"Can you understand, Mildred," said Ann, "that *life* sometimes consists in not being practical?"

Her friend in her turn shrugged her shoulders. "Well," she said, "if you're not going to be *practical*— For one thing, as like as not there'll be a baby."

"There won't be, yet," said Ann.

"Good God," interjected the steamer-chair, "so you've discussed that?"

Ann flashed round on him. "Of course we've discussed that, Tom," she said. "Why not? Do you think two people decide to do what we've decided to do without looking things in the face? Do we live in the Dark Ages? It's you that are mad, Tom. Can't you realise that Dick and I *love* each other, *understand* each other, feel that—that——?"

"Then why not marry?" queried Mildred. "If it's

as straightforward as that, why fly in the face of Society ? Wait a little, marry, and at least have that amount of protection. Isn't it rather—rather *cheap*, dear, to give yourself away like this ? ”

“ Marriage has done me such a lot of good in the past, hasn't it, Mildred ? Protected me, hasn't it ? Oh, a wonderful institution ! Look here, you two, if Dick turns out a rotter, I'd rather be free to walk off even if it is on two hundred a year, and if he is what I think, what's the good of marriage ? He won't let me down in that case. As for Society—well, you can keep it. I've seen all I want to of Society, thanks.”

“ That's all very heroic and so on, dear, but your friends——”

“ My friends, and his, Mildred, are of two sorts. There are those who are friends to *us*, real friends, friends who will understand and trust us, and there are those who are friends because of this 'Society' you talk about. Those we shall lose, and good riddance. Dick's proved that already, over his religious troubles. Besides, Mildred, have you forgotten ? Do you think I want anyone but Dick ? ”

Mildred settled herself comfortably. “ I suppose, Ann, you refer to my own marriage. Well, neither Tom nor I are afraid of discussing that. I am quite content with Tom, but we've been married twenty years. The sort of state you're in doesn't last twenty years, Ann, fortunately. You can't live in the clouds for ever, my dear, even if it is cynical to say so.”

Ann turned away to her star. It was no longer solitary and it shone brightly. “ Did you even *want* to 'live in the clouds for ever' Mildred ? ” she asked quietly. “ I think you would not have said 'cheap' if you had.”

III

So much for Ann's friends; there remains Aubrey. He had but one point of view, and at least that singleness of outlook did him credit. "But the *sin* of it, Dick," he said, scarlet.

Ann had sought her opportunity on the evening of the day following the river excursion, but Dick had not waited so long. He had nearly aroused Aubrey that night, but remembrance of the discussion that had followed his disclosure of their first meeting made him hesitate. From the first, Aubrey had concentrated on Ann's divorce and had side-tracked the personal element. The two friends had sparred about that—the legal question, the meaning of morality, the business of the State, ultimately the Authority of the Church. To Aubrey, that Dick should obviously like the girl was incomprehensible. He himself would have turned away his eyes like the monk in the Middle Ages, his only concession that he would have left her to God rather than to the Inquisition. Thus this *dénouement* never entered his mind as a possibility. True, in the course of conversation, he had given Dick a glimpse of his previous fears, but both had found them laughable. Even now Dick could not conceive that he would have left the Church in the first place for Ann. And in his friend's obvious amusement at the thought, Aubrey had found more comfort than he realised. The possibility that Dick having left the Church, Ann might appear very differently to him, had not dawned on Aubrey. Their talk of Dick's present position had been all theoretical. This was the harsh reality.

So, then, when Dick had entered his bedroom with the morning tea, Aubrey had sat up in bed and listened to him incredulously. He found it indeed hard to

believe that this was the Dick Thurstan he had seen at the altar and in the pulpit, who now walked the length of his room, up and down, and declared his monstrous love for Ann. There was nothing of mysticism in their meeting, in their instant response, to Aubrey. It was just a temptation of the devil, a hellish plot to drag his friend under, sin. "But the *sin* of it, Dick," he said, scarlet.

Dick stopped, threw up his head as if scenting the battle, and laughed. "Sin, Aubrey? I tell you it would be sin if I did not go away with Ann."

Aubrey was appalled. "How can you possibly speak so, Dick!" he exclaimed.

"How can I speak so? How could I speak otherwise? Look here, Aubrey, what is life *for*, what is it all about, anyway? I mean why are we here, where do we go, what are we supposed to be at? *You* don't know, and nor do I, or at least if you can bring yourself to waive for the sake of argument what religion has taught you, you don't know. Only a few guiding lines emerge. One is our intelligence: we *MUST* use it. If we don't, we might as well apply to the nearest lunatic asylum. I'm *bound* to think, and to apply what I think to my religion, and to my job in that religion. That's plain. I've done it. And now, now——" Dick turned and walked the room again.

Aubrey was patient. "Yes, old man. I'm trying to see your point of view."

"Well, now something has come bang into my life from beyond—an imperative new thing. I *love* this girl. I can't explain it; I don't pretend to understand it; but I love her. I go further: something in me, something deep in me, cries out that we ought to be together. If I don't obey that, I do indeed 'sin' against the only voice in all the world that I can plainly hear."

"But—but, Dick, being in love is a common experience. It's just nature. It's—it's *emotion*. If—" and Aubrey suddenly saw the point he ought to make with a certain perspicacity—"if you put your reason on one side, here, at the call of emotion, why did you not do the same with regard to the Church? Did you not 'love' God?"

Halfway through that little speech, Dick had stopped in his walk once again and stood regarding his friend intently. Now he threw himself into a chair, still staring at him. Nor did he answer at once.

Aubrey repeated himself. "And our Lord—you loved our Lord, Dick."

Dick spoke gravely. "I never realised it before, Aubrey. That is exactly what I did not do."

His friend was horrified, almost terrified. It seemed to him a sort of blasphemy. He glanced instinctively at the crucifix on the wall opposite. "Oh, Dick, don't say that," he cried. "I *know* you did. I heard it in your voice, I saw it in your eyes."

"You did not, Aubrey," said Dick slowly. "You thought you did. I thought I did too. But if it's to be talk of *love*,—no, Aubrey, I love Ann as I never loved God."

"That's just sex," ventured the little man, uncomfortably. "We all have sex in us."

Dick ignored him. "There's something instinctive, super-reasonable, about my love for Ann. I can no more doubt it than I can the sun in the sky. I can't lie—I never felt that about God. If I had—" (He left the sentence unfinished.) "I wonder if, perhaps, the saints have honestly felt about God as I do about Ann. *Honestly*. In a flash. I doubt it."

Aubrey was silent. To compare this sudden mad passion of his friend for this girl with the love of, say,

Saint Theresa for God, seemed to him horrible. Yet he began to remember certain passages in her books. There were passages he had always disliked. They closed his lips.

Dick jumped up again. "Yes. That's clear, explain it as you will. But even so your argument fails. This isn't emotion overpowering reason. There's no *reason* why I shouldn't go off with Ann. We're both of age. We want to test each other. We *want* each other. We have the money. As for the future—well, if one never did anything because of a possible future, one might as well lie down and die and have done with it!"

"But you can't justify immorality just because you *want* the girl!"

Dick flashed about. "Why not?" he demanded.

Aubrey stammered. "Well," he said, "well . . . Well, where should we all *be*? What would the world come to?"

"What the hell do I care? I've not got to live *your* life or Mrs. Mickle's or Hedge's. I've got to live my own. And it's in a bloody mess. This is the arc-light in the darkness."

Aubrey got as nearly angry as was possible with him. "All right," he said, "if you want Felix to set your moral standard. . . ."

"Well, and why not?" demanded Dick. "Possibly Felix is a damned sight more right than your moralists. He's true to Nature; they're not. Gosh, Aubrey, I'm sorry I'm swearing. That doesn't help any. But I see where you and I part company."

"No, no, Dick," said Aubrey, genuinely moved.

"In a manner of speaking, I mean. Look here, you think Nature is a mirror of God, don't you? We've talked about that. It reflects His beauty and purpose, and so on, doesn't it? Well, I tell you you are talking

out of your hat. There's no beauty in nature: it's you who imagine beauty, who create it, as it were. Something pretty wonderful follows from that, as a matter of fact, but for the moment that's not the point. Real nature is just the sort of blind passion there is in me now. Nature never stops to think. It's not 'pretty' in its working. It's ruthless and cruel and animal. Like Felix. *You* see that as horrible, just as you see other facets as lovely. But you can't pick and choose, Aubrey. This sex-passion is just as much part of nature as your roses. Come to that, your roses are part of the sex-business. They aren't there to please *your* nose and eyes, Aubrey: they're there to attract bees. Why? To please the bees? Not on your life—to make more and more roses, and more and more bees. And the end? Get into a tropical forest and see for yourself, old dear! Overcrowding, things trampling each other down, things fighting for life—no check except death, no rhyme or reason. Life—life—life—that's all there is to it. A thundering machine. *Why*, God knows."

He paced the room again two or three times; then laughed, and threw himself on the bed. "And Ann and I," he said, "we too have got to fight for life. Here we are, drawn spontaneously to each other, Love flashing between us. And both of us feeling that we've got to take it, seize it, snatch it, though it hurts your feelings and treads on the toes of all the world. What the deuce does the world matter? Ann and I, that's all."

"But—but—but why fly in the face of everything, Dick? Why not marry? What's to stop it?"

"Everything. Aubrey, I tell you that that girl and I both feel the same. Your 'marriage'—submission to your social code, and to your religious one, too, for the matter of that—is a snare, a plausible snare. Fuss, legalities, oaths, friends, respectability—all that *smothers*

love nine times out of ten. And what do we *want* it for? Do you think I'll feel more 'right' in Ann's arms in Paris if I go and sign a register in London first? No, Aubrey."

"But that's just anarchy——"

"What do I care, even if it really is, which I doubt. Besides, how do I know I'll love Ann a month hence? Or that she'll love me? How can you tell? I know *now*, but I don't know how or why or wherefore. And if we change, have we then to go dragging through law courts and be held up to vile laughter in filthy newspapers? Good God, I won't risk taking Ann through *that* again. Nor she me. She knows."

"Well, separate for a few months. Perhaps, then, you'll forget——"

"Good advice, Aubrey. I'd give it myself to another. But instinctively I reject it for myself. Why? Because I *might* forget! Besides, does one ever get clear-headed with this sex instinct unsatisfied? I tell you, I want Ann *physically* as well as spiritually. Till I've had her, I won't know my own mind."

"Dick, Dick, that's terrible."

"Why? What were we given bodies for? Why should I be ashamed of wanting to do the thing planted most deeply in me, the thing that has created the world? No, Aubrey, that's where we divide again."

"I don't see——"

"No, you wouldn't. I don't mean to be a beast, but you wouldn't, Aubrey. You're *scared* of nature. You believe what you've been taught—a fallen world, a standard of morality, and all the rest of it. I don't, any longer. I'm on my own feet. I *want* these *real* things. Here's a call, come to me out of the void, a call to experience life and not to funk it. It's all

marvellously summed up in Ann. Well, I follow Ann. I'll see what comes of it. Like Columbus!"

"I—I——"

Dick laughed. He stretched his arms and tightened his muscles. "Heavens, how good it is to be alive! Ann's done that for me already. Columbus? Oh, don't you see, there he was this side the Atlantic, the unknown, the great circling ocean of the world. 'Don't you dare step in,' said Society; 'it isn't done.' 'Don't you dare step in,' said Religion; 'it's an insult to the Majesty of God who made the earth flat.' Well, he stepped in. And he found a new world."

"He might very easily have been lost, for all that," said Aubrey.

"Sure," said Dick, "gloriously lost, and what then? Would he have been so much worse off? Anyway, Aubrey, you don't understand that I'm lost *now*. My old world has buckled up under me. It's the new or nothing."

Aubrey sighed. Then he glanced at the clock. "It's time to dress," he said.

Dick laughed. "Oh, Aubrey! 'Time to dress'! That's exactly what you and yours have done to life."

IV

As the crow flies, Penscott Hall and Harker's Orchard are not five miles apart, but not yet did the two households meet. Ann saw to that, but she had her work cut out. Tom was restrained with difficulty from interviewing Dick, and not much less easily was Dick restrained from interviewing Tom. "It's up to me, Ann," he had said. "I'd be willing to meet your people, and if I can't do that, possibly I ought to meet your friends. I don't know, though. It's all new to me."

Ann laughed. "I hope so, my dear. But trust me. In the first place, Tom would merely lose his temper and be objectionable, and you might lose yours and hurt him. Neither event would help matters. And as for my people, I doubt very much if they *would* meet you. Mother's got a sort of worldly common-sense. What'd be the *good* of it? You see nobody on earth can stop us."

That had been on the river. Since the announcement, Ann had not seen Dick. She wished not to—romantically. "Let's write every day," she had said, "but don't let's meet. I'm so sure. And I *want* to come to you absolutely on our third day!"

Tom Sinclair was more difficult to restrain, and perhaps it was only his natural indolence that gave Ann the victory in the end. For Tom had got deeper into a rut than he knew. Stuck there, he grumbled and cursed and argued with the girl whenever she or his wife allowed him, but it would have meant a bigger effort than he could bring himself to make to go and face Dick. "A Catholic priest, by God!" swore Tom. That stumped him. What could one say to an ex-Catholic priest? To his wife, in the evening in their bedroom, he usually talked vaguely of horse-whips, but in the morning he always thought better of it. He blamed his caution on the age and country. "The times we live in! Don't know what the country's comin' to!"

It was a trying fortnight for Ann for all that. More than once she thought of going away. She did arrange to spend the last night in town, and announced her intention at a scene of concentrated vehemence on the Colonel's part. Mildred acquiesced more readily. After all, she thought, it might be as well if the headstrong girl did not actually leave from *her* house. Sir Theodore Rudde was a somebody. One met him occasionally.

In any case, it would be awkward enough. So Ann found an ally in that.

Dick lived from day to day in a whirlpool of emotion, but from day to day, or rather from letter to letter, he grew more resolved and more light-hearted. Aubrey completely failed to understand him. The truth was, of course, that Penluma and the Bishop and the past generally, were slipping away. The real Dick was emerging from a world of repressions and overstrain. He found, for one thing, a good deal to do. When Aubrey got a hint of it, he was finally nonplussed. Thus:

"But, Dick,"—they were strolling round the garden—"where's the money coming from? You can't take Lady Ann about Europe third class and feed her on bread and cheese! She's not used to it."

"Pretty soon would be," retorted Dick. "You don't know Ann."

"Perhaps not, but——"

"Anyway, I'm not going to do it. I don't want to. This is my honeymoon and I'm going to give her the time of her life. We shall neither of us have this year again."

"On two-fifty?"

"Two-fifty? Heaven help you, Aubrey! That two-fifty is the result of five per cent War Loan. Tax free, Aubrey old dear, that was the catch. Two-fifty is five fifties, and each fifty is a thousand pounds, Aubrey. Doesn't that sound better? A thousand a year for five years. I guess we'll manage on a thousand a year."

"But, my dear Dick, what then? That's your capital! This is madness!"

"I daresay, Aubrey. But then, you see, I've been sane so long. Think what may happen in five years, Aubrey! Another war, as like as not. And bang'll go the lot!"

"Don't joke, Dick."

Dick sobered. "I'm not joking, old dear, honestly I'm not. But I've thought it out all right. I know what I'm about. I can't see any further than Ann, and I don't mean to or want to. Ann's stepped bang into the picture, and I'll know the reason why, Aubrey, or perish. And I want to be free to find out. That's why Messrs. Thomas Cook have reserved Pullman seats from London to Dover and a first-class compartment to Paris. That's why there's going to be an easy time in Paris and a *wagon-lit* to Marseilles, when the time comes. I've been poor all my life, Aubrey, and I'm going to be rich for a year. I want the leisure."

Aubrey looked troubled behind his glasses. "God help you, Dick," he said.

"Sure," replied Dick, "and in any case I'll help myself."

Thus, then, it was arranged. Ann was to spend the last night in London and Dick was to meet her on the platform. Neither were to take much baggage : they were experienced enough travellers for that. Truth to tell, Dick had little, and Ann spent a good few of the last days in tearing up old letters, destroying relics, preparing a bundle for the next Waterhouses Jumble Sale. The Vicar might object to her presence at the altar but he would not refuse her old clothes.

Finally each household had a visitor. In the matter of Gerald Haynes, Aubrey had himself to blame, but Mrs. Frenton was part of the normal course of things. Chronologically, Haynes comes first.

Aubrey had written to Haynes and explained why he had had to put him off, and, being Aubrey, had not seen his way to perfect lucidity in regard to Dick. He might have said absolutely nothing, or he might have told the truth. He did neither : Dick was "an old friend of mine,

whom I haven't seen since I was in South Africa," and the letter was a little flurried. Haynes did not exactly "smell a rat," but he was interested. He thought he would rather like to meet Aubrey's friend. So a postcard announced him one Monday and a couple of hours later he had to be met. Dick went in the car to the station. He had to be introduced.

All the way home Haynes racked his memory. As has been said, he and Aubrey had renewed an earlier University acquaintance during the War, and thus it happened that the times of their intimacy corresponded to the times when Aubrey and Dick had seen least of each other. But these had not been watertight compartments, naturally.

For all that, Haynes did not associate this sun-burned healthy layman with his friend's priest-friend in South Africa. Washing his hands before luncheon in Aubrey's bedroom, it came out, however.

"I say, who is this friend of yours? I can't place him."

Aubrey fidgeted visibly. "Oh, a man, I stayed with in South Africa," said he, trying to get out of it.

Haynes was anything but quick in the social uptake. Besides, he deliberately aimed not to be. "What was he doing in South Africa?" he asked.

Aubrey gave it up. "He was the Catholic priest I stayed with, Gerald," he said. "He's left the Church on a matter of principle. He finds he cannot continue to believe their Faith."

Haynes whistled and began to dry his hands carefully. "What troubled him?" he demanded. "The Papal claims?"

Aubrey flushed. He hardly knew why. "He doesn't in the least mind talking about it," he said—almost savagely, for him. "Ask him."

Nor did Gerald. He opened after lunch. "Aubrey

tells me that you have left the Roman Church, Mr. Thurstan," he said, "and that you don't mind talking about it. Naturally it's all very interesting to me, as an Anglo-Catholic. May I ask if it was the Papal Claims that upset you?"

"Oh, no," said Dick. "What's the matter with the Papacy, Mr. Haynes?"

"Well, of course, we admit the western patriarchate of the Bishop of Rome. That's historical. But the claim to Supremacy, to say nothing of Infallibility, goes a bit too far, don't you think?"

"I don't think I do. From your point of view, isn't the voice of the Church the voice of God?"

"Certainly."

"Then whoever expresses the voice of the Church in so much is infallible."

"Yes—put like that."

"So if the Bishop of Rome should come to be the regular vehicle of expression of the voice of the Church, he would be infallible when he expressed it?"

"If, Mr. Thurstan. And never has the undivided Church so recognised him."

"Oh? What about the Council of Chalcedon—that was œcumenical, wasn't it? 'Leo, Bishop of Rome, the rock and base of the Catholic Church and the foundation of the Faith,' if I remember rightly."

Haynes was amazed. His amazement outran his annoyance. "You speak as if you were still a Roman," he said aggrievedly.

"Well, I'm not, Mr. Haynes," said Dick cheerfully. "I'm an agnostic of the worst type. But if I were orthodox at all, I should be a Catholic in the communion of Rome. Sorry, but that's the long and short of it."

Haynes was deeply shocked. "How can you speak cheerfully of agnosticism?" he asked.

"Why, because the sun shines, and the sky's blue, and there are wonderful things in the world, for all that, sir."

Haynes was silent. But that was Dick on the verge of his adventure.

As for Mrs. Frenton, she was Mildred's mother, an elderly lady who arrived at Penscott Hall for her regular half-yearly visit three days before Ann left. "You'll like mother," said Mildred to Ann. "She's a dear. She's had a world of trouble in her life, but she's kept young."

And Ann did. Mrs. Frenton was serene and kind. She was wide awake to the affairs of the day, active for her years, worldly-wise, and she alone could cope wholly satisfactorily with Tom. Of Ann, of course, she knew as much as all Society knew. She watched her with shrewd eyes and said little.

On Ann's last day her secret came out, as these things will. Ann was not ashamed of it either, and after luncheon, left alone in the garden while Mildred paid a call and Tom motored over to Little Bailing to see about a horse, they talked.

"Are you absolutely sure of your own heart, my dear?" queried the old lady gently.

"Absolutely," said Ann.

Mrs. Frenton, sitting upright as was her fashion, looked away over the green lawns. "If I did my duty, I should tell you to distrust that 'absolutely,' I suppose," she said. "It's the fashion. We all of us are bound to change, they say. After all, it's a risky step you're taking."

"Is it, Mrs. Frenton?" queried Ann. "Already I'm a black sheep, and—and I've been through so much that I can face still more."

"Even this, Ann? You don't mind my calling you 'Ann.' It seems to me if this man fails it will hurt you as nothing else can hurt."

Ann nodded. She could not speak. She was easily moved these days.

The old lady laid a hand on her arm. "But, my dear," she said, "there are worse things than broken hearts. There are lost opportunities."

"You mean——" began Ann.

Mrs. Frenton interrupted. "I'm sixty-nine," she said, "and I've lived my life. It's always been regular and—and proper. I've had sorrows and I've had joys, like the rest of us, and now, at last, I'm happy enough. Tom and Mildred are very good to me. My husband left me well off. But I've one regret."

"Yes?" asked Ann, tenderly.

Mrs. Frenton looked keenly at her, unfalteringly. But she did not answer directly. "You're right to take your chance, my dear," she said.

CHAPTER VIII

London—Paris—Constantinople

I

FOR all his enthusiasm, the fatal Wednesday morning found Dick in a curiously mixed state of mind. Ann had foreseen that it would be so; indeed, until they actually met on the Victoria platform, she would not have been enormously surprised if Dick had failed to be there. But she had said nothing, and, whatever he felt, Dick did not fail her.

Aubrey drove him to Broad Chalke, for the eight-ten, a silent unhappy Aubrey who did not help at all. He got into a carriage half-full of the earliest city passengers, a mixture of youths just beginning City life and of failures

who had not, in all their days, achieved the affluence of the nine-thirteen. Face to face with the commonplace, Dick began to realise to the full how wholly he was now turning his back upon his previous life.

When he had ridden from Penluma, he had damned himself in the eyes of Father Lear and his like but not necessarily in the eyes of the world. True, he had shortly found that the average man was inclined to distrust an ex-cleric, suspicious, perhaps, because the average man could find no reason for so strenuous a course of action as Dick had taken in his own faith or unfaith; but he had not put himself wholly beyond the pale. Now, however, he was doing precisely that. For one thing, the Church would interpret his action in one way only: the delayed formal cutting-off would now be inevitable. For another, the average man would never believe that he had left the Church before he met Ann; henceforth, so far as any one thought about it, he would have left the Church because of Ann—and all the more nastily because he denied it. That Ann was a *divorcée*, and "guilty" at that, and that they were not married, would be the final straw. If these young clerks knew, they would think him a splendid villain, and if the older men knew, they would not want to introduce him to their wives.

Not that that mattered very much; it was the final break with orthodoxy that held him for the moment. Irretrievably he was damned there. It was the thought of that had held Aubrey silent and miserable, Dick knew beyond a doubt. And as he visualised it, he, too, was aware of vast sorrows. Memories assailed him. The stark chill beauty of Bethlehem was gone for ever. The heroism of the Cross was gone for ever. His inheritance among the saints in the City of God was finally wiped out.

And for what? For Ann? Yes, in a sense, but in a sense not so much for Ann—the woman of flesh and blood—as for something for which Ann stood, something that Ann symbolised, something of which Ann was the earnest. Ann was the star, but it was the necessity of following that star which meant almost more than the star itself. And it was the idealism, the romanticism, the essential mysticism of that following which suffered hardly in the harsh light of a third-class railway compartment full of men on their daily way to the City.

Dick found himself evaluating small sights and sounds with a new significance, as once before he had done in his last hours at the monastery. A dying man appears to cling to the familiar, holding on desperately to the known ere the last strands of the rope of life part and he be launched into the uncharted sea. So Dick watched newspapers unfolded, pipes and cigarettes lit, hats settled on the rack, greetings with acquaintances exchanged, incurious glances thrown idly at familiar platforms, windows automatically raised for tunnels at well-known points, and the silent hostility which greeted the entrance of “foreigners” from East Croydon station. It was a routine in which he had never shared, but it was also a routine with which he was familiar. In a few hours, it would all be behind him. He would be travelling intimately with a woman for the first time in his life. He would be beyond a return to the conventional world.

Victoria braced him, however. Victoria was always full of utter strangers, individuals who had no connection even with Broad Chalke and who would not by any chance have heard of Harker's Orchard even if the name had been mentioned. Then Victoria, itself familiar, seemed familiar with the new world also. There were comfortably dressed ladies and gentlemen, bound, too, for the Continent, who sailed through the stream of hurrying

City men with obvious indifference. They might be anybody, have done anything. There were posters of that other world on exhibition. Dick stopped for a few seconds and contemplated the Railway Company's idea of Trieste. It somehow reassured him.

So he found a porter with confidence, and the man himself confirmed him. He was as familiar with Pullman-cars as Dick was, it is to be confessed, unfamiliar. Two seats? A lady coming? *All* right, sir. He would find the places and arrange the luggage and be at the door.

Dick was free to buy Ann flowers and chocolates and an absurd collection of papers that he felt instinctively she would like. At a kiosk, he got some expensive Turkish cigarettes, he who habitually smoked Gold Flake. Surreptitiously he looked at himself in a glass: he was not even yet quite used to civilian dress. Then, with a pair of binoculars over his shoulder and his stick in his hand, he strolled up and down, in a fever of impatience, awaiting Ann.

He caught sight of her at last and was profoundly elated at once. A porter preceded her, carrying suitcases and a travelling-rug. She herself followed, it seemed to him so infinitely serene and almost, as it were, regal. She carried her head high, and while he knew it was Ann, she might almost have been another woman, someone outside his life, a being from another sphere. To look at her, you would not have thought she was doing anything unusual or out of the common. You could not associate with her the mean and the disgraceful. She was so fresh and clean and young, advancing up the dirty platform and through the hurrying people as if Time waited on her word while the noise and the confusion passed her wholly by.

Dick advanced eagerly towards her, unconscious that

she, too, was apprehensive and was weighing his every action and word. "Ah, my dear," she said, "there you are. Oh, Dick, I'm so happy! Is it really true?"

Dick grinned. "I guess so. How many suit-cases?"

"Two," triumphantly. "I told you two and I've stuck to two. And I've hardly any extra things. I'm even wearing my best hat to avoid a hat-box, though what I shall do if it's a bad crossing, I can't imagine."

Dick was suddenly very proud. This beautiful creature was his! Then he was equally suddenly abjectly humble for the same reason. "Ann," he cried, "Ann," like a schoolboy.

A gloved hand sought his arm. The lady of fashion subtly vanished. "Dick," she whispered, her eyes alight, "I'm *enormously* excited. Suppose somebody saw us. *Anybody* might, here. What should we say? And I'm *longing* to be in Paris and away."

Dick laughed. Self-confidence returned to him. "If you could cut them, you would," he said. "If you couldn't, you'd introduce me and we'd pass on, smiling. Let 'em think what they like and do what they like. It doesn't matter to *us*, Ann."

Her hand tightened. "Oh, Dick, I do love you so," she whispered.

The Pullman-car stood in gloom and the lamps were lit. It all looked infinitely cosy. Dick's porter redoubled his activity on sight of Ann. In five minutes she was comfortably ensconced in the padded seat, her chocolates and cigarettes before her, and her papers on the table. "Let's have some tea, Dick, as quickly as possible," she said. "I simply couldn't eat this morning."

Sipping tea, they passed again through East Croydon Station. It had wholly changed, Dick noticed.

II

When we no longer cross the Channel by water, an age will have come to an end and romance have put an extra thousand miles or so between herself and England. For air travel is already painfully practical. You drive up to the aerodrome in your car and step without confusion into a comfortable seat. The seat stops at Paris and you drive to your hotel. Not much otherwise do the leisurely gentlemen catch the nine-thirteen from Broad Chalke to the City.

But, as it is, the journey from London to Paris by rail and sea remains an adventure. It is perfectly true that the whole thing is a fraud and that it would be difficult, being in possession of a ticket, not to arrive in Paris; but the illusion remains. In the London taxi, it always seems unlikely that one will find a porter at the crowded terminus and eventually the train. In the train, the problem of transport to the boat, the intricacies of platforms and piers and offices, seem insurmountable. The romantically minded would always take long odds that they will not get a seat on the boat. And even then there are the shouting numbers which it is impossible to remember, the bewildering babel of Customs and passport officials, the foreign train. It is difficult to believe that one might not get lost on the piers, murdered on the platforms, starved in the train. Paris becomes a lovely thing, a fairy city, a kingdom of God that must be taken by force.

These things are capable of making one genial towards even old ladies fussing at every step or abominable gentlemen who have plainly no right to be sharing at all in the adventure of going abroad. But as a rule they also make one hate one's travelling companion with an awful hatred. Too slow or too quick, too anxious or too calm, horribly

excitable or exasperatingly *blasé*, you know he is the last person in the world with whom you should be travelling.

It was of course impossible that Dick should feel thus towards Ann or Ann towards Dick, but when they were actually in the Paris train, when the waiter had been assured that they would take lunch and when lunch had finally been taken, they sat opposite each other, alone in their reserved compartment, thoughtful and silent. Had he known it, Ann was chiefly conscious of enormous content. After the last fortnight, the mere absence of critics was bliss, but there was more in it than that. England itself was behind, that England which she would never see again without visions of the Divorce Court, the evening papers, the screaming newsboys. And Dick was here, Dick who was proving himself better than she had hoped, Dick on whom one could lean, who was equal to emergencies, capable, strong, dear. Ann was tired, but Ann was very happy. She had been longing for Dick with a passion that had grown with every day's slow passing. And now Dick was opposite to her. In a few hours she would be in his arms and nothing else would matter. She did not even wish that the kilometres would pass more quickly: anticipation was so good. Dear Dick. . . .

But Dick's reaction was not quite so simple. He had been in a whirlpool of thought all day and he wanted to talk about it. He wanted to be sure that Ann *understood*, to be assured that she saw things as he did. At St. Omer, therefore, he got up and crossed over to her side of the compartment which they had to themselves.

She greeted him with a smile, and he took her arm, resting a little against her. "What is it, Dick?" she queried.

"How do you know it's anything?"

"Oh, I know. Don't you think I *should* know, sweetness?"

"Perhaps, Ann. But that's so new to me. Do you know I'm beginning to realise how lonely I've been all my life."

She bent over suddenly and kissed him. "No more, Dick, darling."

He smiled. "I wonder. It'll be almost too good to be true if one can really escape being alone. But that's not what I want to talk about, Ann."

"Well, what is it? Say, what you like, old dear."

Dick was silent for a few seconds and Ann waited, watching him. The train hurried by cottages, trees, roads, canals. Dick was staring out at them, unseeing.

At last he spoke. "Ann, you know what people will say about us?"

"Yes."

"Well, they'll be wrong."

"Naturally." Ann smiled.

"But, Ann, do *you* understand how terribly wrong they'll be? Not the crowd—I don't mean them, I mean the moralists, the people who write books to show that you and I and people like us are dragging morality into the dirt, and England with us. What we're doing is exactly the opposite."

"Is it, Dick? I'm glad, but I'm afraid I don't much care. Perhaps it's not my job to care. All I care about is you." She stopped abruptly.

"But you must care, Ann," he cried eagerly. "Look here, why don't we marry? What's the real reason? *They'll* say it's because we set lightly by morality, but the real reason is because we take it very seriously. We're not going off like this because we want to enjoy each other for a year or two and then chuck it. We're going like this because we can't swear the things they want us to swear—

because swearing them belittles them—because we want to keep our love for ever and ever—because their way is disgusting and the surest way to lose it. Think what it would be, Ann, if we'd begun this morning with a pack of lies. All that infernal rubbish about God and Eden and being made one. We're not one yet, Ann. We may grow to it, we may find it waiting for us, but that's on the knees of the gods. And suppose it had all been presumed, and weighted into the bargain with rewards and punishments! Suppose there had been dozens of little men and women at the end of a preposterous ceremony to say: 'There now! *Now* go off to it!' Oh, my God, Ann. I couldn't have gone through that, even for you."

Ann smiled quizzically. Funny old Dick! "Do you think anybody takes it so seriously these days?" she asked.

"That's exactly the point! Some do—the pious—and they're believing lies; others don't—the moderns,—and they *ought* to do. They ought to get up and *smash* the system. Instead of saying it doesn't matter, they ought to say it *does* matter. Nothing matters like religion, Ann, and morality. It's just because people go on pretending the false is true that we're rotten at the core. It's like prayer—as if anybody believed in it now!"

"I think I do," said Ann slowly.

"Ann, you can't! Honest prayer, in the real meaning of the word, I mean. Nowadays, of course, they try to pretend that prayer is a sort of sentimental psychological dream-state that does one good. But I mean prayer as Christ taught it. 'If ye shall ask anything of thy Father . . . He will give it you.' 'Ask, and ye shall receive.' 'Give us this day our daily bread.' All *that's* rubbish."

"Why, Dick?"

"Why, because it *is*. If the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury and the President of the Free Churches, and anybody else you like, were to sit down in the middle of the Sahara and pray for food and water, and if all the pious in all their congregations were to do so as well, do you think they would not suffer the last agonies of thirst and hunger? That's the *truth*. Prayer never turned aside a bullet yet, nor brought a drop of rain, nor increased a Divine blessing on anyone. It may comfort the foolish and strengthen the weak, but in that case the god who answers is the person who prays!"

Ann studied him curiously. How odd that he should feel so strongly! "Do you know I've never thought much about these things," she said.

"Haven't you? And here are we going off together! Come to think of it, I suppose you expected me to talk about something very different in the train to Paris. Oh, Ann, what a spree! Just imagine your Tom and Mildred! They're probably thinking of you. If they knew we were discussing theology!"

She smiled and put her hand up to stroke his hair. "You funny old boy," she said.

"Darling, I'm not funny. If I'm too serious, I can't help it. I want this love of ours, this thing that we are doing, to be a *fine* thing, that's all. I want us always, deliberately as now, to choose truth instead of ignorance, courage instead of cowardice, faith instead of doubt. I want that last especially. I want to have absolute faith in you, and you in me. Whatever happens."

"Of course, but what do you mean?"

"Listen, Ann. You think you love me now, and you do. I think I love you, too, and I do. That I do love you is the one sure thing I know—now. But years hence, how do we know what is coming? Look here, Ann, I want you to promise you'll never live a lie with

me. If you find you don't go on loving me more and more,—and you can't stop still ; no life stops still ; it'll be more and more, or less and less—well, if you find you only *tolerate* our living together, or if you fall in love with someone else, will you *promise* to tell me, promise to leave me ? I don't *want* to hold you by anything except your love. I shall try to keep it, try to deepen it, but I may fail. And if I fail, will you go ? ”

Ann regarded him gravely. As once before, the contrast there was in him pulled at her heart-strings. He was such a boy, such an *absurd* child, and yet he was such a man. She saw that he was feeling deeply, speaking the things of his own heart of hearts. She only half understood. It seemed to her as if there were two people with her in the carriage, one a child who needed comfort and mothering more even than he knew, and another, a man, who was already going beyond her, who was trying to stand for great causes, who was pitting his strength against the world. Love and compassion and reverence rose in her like a flood. She bent towards him.

“ Oh, Dick, Dick, beloved, hold me in your arms. Hold me tight, Dick. Dick, if—if—if I fail in loving you, don't make me put you away at once. It would be my fault, my silliness, my weakness, Dick, beloved. You'd bear with me a little, beloved, wouldn't you ? ”

Dick took her in his arms. “ My love, my love,” he whispered. “ With whatever strength there is in me, I promise you that, my darling. But it's so much more likely to be the other way. I'm so restless, such a fool. Hold on to me, too, tight, tight, darling, will you ? ”

After a while, she disengaged herself, a new Ann. “ Heavens, Dick,” she cried, “ suppose a porter or a conductor or somebody or another came along ! They're liable to any minute.”

“ Damn their eyes,” said Dick, smiling at her.

"Very likely, but you've just said prayers are useless, my dear. I understand we've to be very practical."

"Don't joke, Ann."

"Diddums! But I won't, Dick. And Dick, I like you to talk to me like that. I'm awfully stupid, but I want to learn. I want to see with your eyes and understand what you're thinking about. You see, no one has ever talked to me like that."

"Really? I can't understand that."

"Can't you? It's simple enough. You've lived all your life among priests and clever people. Thinking and talking's natural to you. But do you suppose it is to everyone? It isn't, my dear. My husband would have thought that sort of thing indecent. Aunt Helen believed implicitly in her clergyman and the Bible. Mother never does anything Society says she shouldn't. Francis was too young. And as to Harold—you remember Harold?—well, he and I did not stop to think for five minutes all the time we knew each other!"

"I can't understand that."

She leant back and regarded him. "I wonder. Think of the war, Dick, and of a girl who had been just *frozen* by her husband. And then he came along, so alive, so reckless, such a great baby. He never would talk sense. If I tried to make him reasonable, he just kissed me! If I talked about my people and behaving, he'd just say I'd eyes like—like—oh, never mind! And he set something afire in me, Dick."

Dick was conscious, in that moment, of something of which he had not been conscious before. He leant towards her. "You don't think I have that in me, Ann," he questioned low, "eh?"

Ann flushed. "Dick," she faltered.

He caught her hand. "Ann," he whispered, "you've never in your life been loved as I love you."

III

Ann awoke in the early morning and instantly recalled her surprise of the evening before. Outside, the small side-street was full of Parisian noises—the gossip of women, the passage of rough wheels on cobble-stones, shrill cries. The windows were open and sound filtered in, but pleasantly. The sun shone in also, and there was a freshness in the air, as if it had been sprinkled with water like the pavement below and the floors of the little shops. The room itself was empty-looking, clean and cheerful. There was nothing whatever pretentious or ornate about it, and, better still, nothing cosmopolitan. But then they were, she knew, not in one of the hotels which stud Europe from London to Constantinople and are exactly the same—garish decorations, identical menus, prices totally unrelated to reality. Instead, they were south of the Seine, and so far as she was concerned they might not have been in Paris at all. The Hotel Vienna. Why “Vienna” did not appear, but after all “Vienna” was just as good, so far as the name went, as “Bristol,” “London,” “Majestic,” and the others, even if it had not “Grand” in front of it. And as far as the rest was concerned, it was a great deal better. She sighed with happiness and moved ever so little lest she should awake Dick.

He lay, in the first pair of silk pyjamas (so he had told her last night) that he had ever possessed in his life, a-sprawl on the edge of the bed. His hair was ruffled, his left arm flung out, his right under the pillow, and his face half-hidden in his left arm. It was the first time she had seen him asleep and it was difficult to prevent herself kissing him as he lay there. But she did not want to wake him; she wanted to recall the amazing Dick of the night before.

First, there were the exterior things—his confidence in little affairs such as porters and tips, his knowledge of a Paris she did not know, his amazing ability to order a meal that was somehow entirely unlike the usual meal one ate in hotels and restaurants, his gaiety, his high-handedness. But below all that, there had been the revelation of a Dick totally unlike the Dick she had seemed to know so well in the woods of Kent. Yet—yet—not unlike. It was the same Dick, she knew that, but a Dick who had as it were been buried for years and years and who was just emerging. She must have been the cause, too. That was the wonder of it.

But perhaps still more wonderful had been her own reaction to him. She had seemed to herself so tired and used and old a week ago. Life seemed to stretch interminably behind. She might have lived half a dozen lives for the weariness of her. There was her marriage—that was one life, and France during the War—that was another. Then there had been the aftermath of the War, dreary months in England with the fact of her husband leaning over her like a perpetual menace. Then the kaleidoscope of travel, with the new men and the sense with everyone she met that she was regarded as a woman to whom you could say things and with whom you could do things that you could not do or say to the average girl of her age. How she had resented it! She had clung to her youth; no, to her essential youthfulness. It had been a perpetual battle, a battle in which she had been nearly defeated. Ann shivered a little as with cold.

But Dick! How utterly different last night had been to that week with—(she smiled to herself)—with Harold. She and Harold had gone to a big hotel where you had the feeling that no one *expected* you to be married. Married! That was a silly word to use, and yet, with Dick, that was exactly what she did feel. At the Grand

Hotel Continental, however, at least in 1917, every waiter and page and maid looked *through* you, leered at you as it were, bowed obsequiously, expected a double tip. And no wonder. They had registered, sent up their luggage and gone to the bar. Half-hidden under a palm, conscious of her flimsy "glad-rags," for ever meeting the calculating glances of men in uniform, staring at the array of bottles through a cloud of cigarette smoke, drugged by the laughter and buzz of talk and slang, she had drank cocktail after cocktail with the rest. Oh, she was no Puritan: she had wanted to do it. She had wanted, deliberately, to excite herself, to see the world through a rosy haze. Harold had noted her semi-intoxication with approval—she knew that all the time. He was flushed when they went up to change. He had helped her take off her dress, and clung to her, fingering her with a curiosity she had had to restrain. Yet it was beastly to think of him like that. He had been a dear, and it was almost as if they had known all the time that he was going to his death.

So they had gone to the Casino de Paris. There were only three or four places one ever did go to in Paris, so far as she and Harold had known. They had met two brother officers of his, on leave too, and they had appraised her and known what she was doing and approved. A couple of French girls had joined the group with them, and she had not minded. Harold, however, had taken her away. And back in the hotel, supper and dancing and jazz, and in their bedroom a wild abandonment to the moment and a cup of life drained to the dregs.

She had refused to tire of it for his sake, but she had tired. It had been a hectic week—a jumble of taxis, dances, clothes, bars, wine, girls and jazz. It was as if they had determined to be mad, and Harold had been content. That was the great thing, in retrospect. He

had gone off at last at an early hour from the great station, very grateful. She would never forget that departure—the great echoing place, the noise, the dirt, the signs of war, and Harold kissing her, misty-eyed. “I can’t thank you enough,” he had said. “You’ve been an absolute trump. It’s just been heaven. And write to me, won’t you?” She had written, and they had returned her letters, afterwards, unread. He hadn’t had time to receive even one.

She had gone from the station to bed and had slept as if she had been drugged.

That was a hundred years ago, in another world, when she had been another Ann. And Dick had made the difference, the incredible Dick of last night.

She tried to analyse it, and did not well succeed. Of course there had been the outside circumstances—the drive to this hotel, a smiling madame, an unembarrassed surveying of their room, their departure for a small restaurant Dick knew behind the Gare Mont Parnasse. He had been welcomed by the proprietor and had gone to the table of his old *garçon*. They had dined delightfully by the side of middle-aged Frenchmen who had tucked huge napkins under their chins and eaten with enthusiasm and economy. They had walked to the Seine, and strolled along in the starlight, and sat hand in hand, with the swift flood between them and Notre-Dame, while Dick talked. She had listened, amazed at the quick brain and eager discussion of themes and topics that would have left Harold or Tom or most of the men she had ever met, staring in bewilderment. Everything he had said had been new to her, and new with a sense of life and vigour that was never still. And he had deferred to her and tried to *reach* her, for it was just that. She could feel him striving to get into her mind, to make her see, to see with her. A wonderful night.

And then he had jumped up like a schoolboy and taken her arm. They had walked gaily home. In their room, he had been tender. Passionate, too, yes, but beneath his passion she had sensed so acutely his worship of her, his devotion. He had hallowed love, somehow. She turned it over in her mind. When he had kissed her—her neck and breasts and arms—it had been as if he had been adoring a mystery, looking with new eyes into a holy of holies. “Oh, my lovely Ann,” he had murmured, “do you *really* love me? You *like* me to kiss you? Tell me—true, Ann darling—do you *like* me to touch you? Do you *want* me?”

She had had—well, what had she had? She tried to analyse it. No sense of shame, of course: that seemed to stand for granted. But it had been so natural, so normal. There had been nothing artificial about it, no other stimulus but affection, no other guide but nature. But the fire of passion had torn through her as she had not thought possible. She had clung to him as if she could never let him go. She had lain at last in his arms utterly spent. And she could bear the mere remembrance no more: she turned in the bed towards him, snuggled up to him, kissed him.

Dick stirred and woke. For a second he looked at her sleepily, so that she smiled. “You’ve forgotten who’s here!” she said.

He caught her in his arms and pressed her to him, gently forcing her head into the hollow of his arm while one hand stroked her hair. “Shut up,” he said. “I won’t be ragged at this hour of the morning! How did you sleep, darling?”

“Like a top, but I woke half an hour ago. I’ve been thinking of such heaps of things, Dick.”

“Poor old Ann! You shouldn’t think, my darling. Let me do it for you. You haven’t the head for it!”

She nestled closer. "Dick, I have. And I want to. I want to think about everything we do. I don't want to miss a second of this. I want sort of—oh, I don't know—to sort of *understand* each second. Do you really love me very, *very* much, Dick?"

His arm strayed to her waist. She could feel it stroking her flesh, and thrilled eagerly to the touch. "Of course I do, my darling."

"But why, Dick? Dick, are you *sorry* I—I—I didn't come to you *fresh*?"

His arm tightened on her and his voice changed. "Ann, you're never to say that, you're never even to think that."

She hid her face. "But it's true, sweetness," she whispered.

He moved a little so that he could see her, and with his right hand he forced her face from its hiding-place. "Ann, it's not. Do you hear: it's *not*. You've given me what you've never given anyone else, haven't you? Isn't that true?" He kissed her eyes, hungrily.

"Yes," she whispered, "yes, Dick, it is, somehow. But I don't quite know how. Most men——"

"Damn most men. What the devil do I care about 'most men.' Leave the blighters out, Ann. It's the soul of you that you've given me, beloved, the spirit of you. Heavens, and a month ago I didn't believe in souls!"

She pushed her hand under his pyjama jacket and stroked his male flesh that was so different from hers.

"Ann, I love that!" he whispered at her touch.

"Do you, Dick? I wonder that you should, somehow. I'm not stroking your soul, you know!"

He laughed and turned a little, luxuriously, that her hand might have free play with him. "Oh, but you're gorgeous, my darling," he said.

"Dick tell *me*."

"Well, can't you see it's all a sort of sacrament? I daresay it sounds silly to talk of sacraments in bed the first morning, but I can't help it and I don't myself see that it is silly. Isn't it always the spirit underlying the action that matters, *Ann*? When you shake hands with anyone, it isn't the hand and shake that matters. *You* don't even shake hands with me as you do with other people."

"Don't I, Mr. Conceit! But suppose I kissed other people. Would you mind that?"

He smiled. "Not in a way," he said.

She laughed up at him. "All right," she teased. "I shall remember."

He bent and kissed her lips, softly first, then with sudden passion, feeling her lips with his own, arousing to her touch, turning towards her. "Darling, darling," he murmured, "my darling."

She struggled a little to be free, protesting. "There you are, *Dick*," she said. "And others—others——" She faltered, tears in her eyes.

He raised himself and bent over her. "Ann, are your lips less wonderful and holy and sweet to me because you've kissed others? Of course they're not. It *isn't* your actual lips that matter. It's you, *you*. You give me your lips as if no one else had ever touched them, and the lips you give to me are new lips, the lips of *my* Ann. And it's so with all your body. It's all *mine*, isn't it? A new Ann. Is every bit of you mine, Ann, darling?"

"Dick, you know it is. Oh my love, do with me what you will. I'm yours, all yours. I've never even been myself till now, I think. And you'll never let me go, will you, *Dick*?"

"Only when you want to go, Ann darling," he said solemnly.

She flung her arms about his neck and pulled him down upon her. "Oh Dick, Dick," she cried, "kill me if I ever want to go, will you, Dick? If I lose you, I lose—oh, I lose God and life and my soul and—whatever comes after. Dick, you must never let me go. Promise me you won't!"

Passion flamed in him. "Never by my will, Ann," he cried.

IV

Dick, in a blue silk dressing-gown, looked out of the window. "There are two men being shaved in the barber's shop opposite, my dear," he said. "Madame Bedouce is also selling bread to a little girl in a pig-tail. Monsieur Loucheur is arranging the papers about his kiosk—at least I think it's Loucheur, though that may be the name of his boss. Therefore I shall now myself go and shave in the bathroom, and meantime will you be so good as to ring the bell? You will then desire coffee, rolls, fruit, honey, butter and anything else you think you want, to be sent up immediately. Is it not so, my cabbage?"

Ann sat up in bed. "Who is likely to come?" she asked. "This nightie is transparent and I gather the Hotel Vienna could be scandalised."

"Yvonne will probably come, or Celestine. Remember me to either."

"Dick, when were you here last? Have you always behaved properly?"

Dick grinned. "Ask her," he said, "unless it's Marguerite."

Ann seized a pillow to throw at him, but he was already outside the door. She heard him go whistling to the bathroom across the corridor. Then she rang the bell.

The breakfast tray appeared before Dick returned, but

he heard it and followed closely. Ann set it upon a small table near the bed and propped herself up on the pillows. Dick, depositing his shaving tackle on the inadequate washstand, sat on the bed itself. "Our first breakfast, Ann," he said.

Ann sniffed. "The coffee smells good, anyway," she replied.

"Doesn't it. And I love those great thick cups. I'm sorry, my dear, but I must eat. I can't resist butter and honey and *petit pain* again. I always eat hugely in France, I don't know why. Tell me—whisper—do you ever order eggs and bacon?"

She shook her head. "Never, my beloved, why?"

He sighed with relief. "They're so expensive. Besides, they're only good for breakfast in England. I don't know why. A matter of soul again, I suppose. Ann, the honey's heavenly."

"Then leave some for me, greedy."

"In the matter of honey, my darling, we will grudge no expense. Shall I ring for more?"

"No. I've enough. Dick, what's the programme to-day?"

"Have you views?" enquired Dick, with his mouth full.

"None whatever. It's all the same to me."

"Then I propose that we do precisely nothing. We will walk forth into the streets till we come to the Seine, cross it, stroll past the Louvre and through the Tuileries. We'll just keep our eyes open. We'll do precisely what we want to do. We'll just watch Paris happening. When we're tired, we'll sit down. When we're hungry we'll eat. And if you like we'll play the game of Cheap Feeds."

"What's that?"

"Ann, *chérie*, you've never really been poor. I have I've——"

"I have been poor. Heavens, in the War——"

"In the War there was always a man willing and anxious to treat you. Moreover, you had behind you the resources of your family. Consequently you always consumed luxurious food at well-advertised restaurants, just as you always stayed at hotels starred by Baedaeker. Now is that not so?"

"Well, perhaps."

"*Voilà!* Now *I've* had to worry about an extra franc, and that man to whom you heard me talking on the *City of Benares*—blessed day—and I, devised the game of Cheap Feeds. You take it in turns to select a restaurant at which one of you dines the other as cheaply as possible consistent with good food and cleanliness. It's an absorbing game, my Ann. It's incredible what you can do and where you find yourself. He who finds the meal at once best and cheapest wins. Shall we play?"

"Rather. But you start."

"I will. I'll set you a marvellous standard too. It's near the Arc de Triomphe, or used to be. That's part of the game—that the restaurants go up and down in quality and price week by week. No one knows why, or I never met anyone who did, anyway."

"But suppose we're nowhere near the Arc de Triomphe?"

"Then we'll take a taxi to it."

"And spend as much on a taxi——"

"Ann, beloved, it's the *game* of Cheap Feeds. We're playing now. There's no need to count the francs this journey."

"But, Dick, we've never talked money, I know—but I don't want you to spend heaps on me. Suppose——"
She hesitated.

"Suppose what?"

"Well, suppose we don't, after all, get on. Suppose

you come to see through me, or—or—well, you know what you said. I don't want to feel——”

“Ann, don't. You're right in a way, but don't. Still, I want to say one thing, my darling.”

“Yes?”

“For three months let's just go on and on. Just living. Day by day. Three months to-day we'll reckon up. We'll sit down quietly wherever we may be and honestly review these three months. We shall know each other then. And we'll swear that we'll tell the truth. If either of us wishes it, we'll part. But if not, why then, three months hence, we'll decide what's to be done. Where we'll live. How. How much we've got. Like pals. Till then, I've plenty and we won't stop to think.”

Ann's eyes searched him, and he met hers gravely. “Done,” she said at last.

Thus, simply, the Odyssey began.

V

Aubrey found himself living for Dick's postcards. It was absurd, but it was so. It was not unnatural that he could not get Dick out of his mind, but it was queer what an obsession the absentees became to him. The first three days had been hectic, days in which the thought of what Dick might be doing was a continual nightmare. He had three Dicks in his mind, a progression that was in itself bewildering; but when he tried to think what the fourth might turn out to be, he was flabbergasted. There was Dick as a priest—reserved, matter of fact, remote when he stood at the altar, genial and a good companion, but curiously unget-at-able. Then there was the Dick he had met at Hordle, with all that reserve gone, a bitter Dick, a Dick that slashed through the age-long Veil of the Temple and revealed pitilessly an empty shrine into

which Aubrey himself simply dared not look. And then there was the Dick of that last fortnight, a Dick who seemed to have suddenly turned his back not only on the Holy of Holies but on the Temple itself, and to have gone leaping down the steps into the sunshine with laughter and an incredible bravado. Aubrey could not believe that that would last. He would find the emptiness of the world more intolerable than that of the shrine. He would come back, but how changed Aubrey could not imagine.

On the fourth day he got a picture postcard of the palace of Versailles thus inscribed: "An amazing place: I suppose you know it. It is like our age that nobody really knows what to do with it. I think it ought to be given to the Pope—who alone could live up to it—or utterly destroyed. D."

Aubrey read and re-read it, and talked about it to Felix. "That's his mood all over," he said. "But one can't live on logic like that, Felix, my dear. Life's compromise. Versailles is an excellent park for the people. You'd like it, pussums. I wonder if you'd learn to catch fish out of the fountains with your paw. But what's he *doing*, Felix? Oh, dear!"

Then, a bolt from the blue, there arrived a card from Carcassonne. Aubrey looked the place up on the map, and sighed unhappily. It seemed to him monstrous that one should rush from Paris to Carcassonne without a word of warning to one's friends. Carcassonne! The feudal fortress! And the card said: "I think I'm being born again. We're just back from a gorgeous run through the mountains past Lastours. Singing water, sunshine and Ann. It's all incredible. D."

It was also incredible, to Aubrey, but even more so the devastating succession. Perpignan—"a wonderful name and an absurd place. Shows you can put no trust in



names. But Ann made it one big rag"; Narbonne; Nîmes; Arles; Avignon—"heard sung mass in the Pope's chapel. •Wonderfully done, I suppose perhaps the best possible, but we agreed on preferring the view from the ramparts." From Marseilles came a hideous picture of the Grand Hotel du Louvre et de la Paix: "Just swanking. You should see us. Ann can live up to it, but not I. We leave for Corsica to-morrow. Doesn't it sound scrumptious? Do you know *anybody* who ever went to Corsica?" Then a week's blank, and one morning Mrs. Mickle handed him several cards showing the Gulf of Porto. "I couldn't 'elp seeing them, sir," she said. "Ain't they lovely?" Aubrey read them, studied them and saw a vision.

He saw Dick and Ann barefoot on the empty golden sands between the ruined Moorish Castle and the immense rocks of the Calenches. He saw them bathing in the laughing, sunlit, transparent sea from the rough-hewn stones of the little lobster jetty. He saw them picnicking, with a bottle of champagne cooling in a mountain stream, in the forests below Evisa. He saw the tiny inn his friend described, with the stone table outside under the blue-gum tree, and their little bedroom under the slanting roof. The proprietor himself had said it wouldn't be good enough for madame. But madame had worn her oldest clothes and eaten the coarse good food and charmed all hearts. And monsieur, monsieur had written: "I had no idea life could be so good. And *I've* won it. Dick." That was disturbing, if you like.

A month lapsed, with Aubrey on tenter-hooks. What was happening, there, at the village of Porto? Was Dick still rejoicing in Paganism? Had he really found anything whatever to make up for the loss of God? When he came back from fairyland, from playing in a garden of the world, what would he do, how would he

stand? And with Ann! Ann who, presumably, could not sympathise at all with the man who had found life in religion to be suddenly confronted with emptiness. For that is what it would be. Emptiness. Aubrey couldn't conceive of life "without God and with no hope in the world." He literally trembled for Dick.

They were still in Corsica in Aubrey's imagination when the card came from Biskra. Biskra! "The Garden of Allah—I *don't* think, Aubrey. Heavens, what a nightmare 'tourisme' can be! But we found a little mosque at Tolga that was perfect. What will you say if I return a Mohammedan? But it isn't likely, since Ann objects to the polygamy part of it. D."

Aubrey's equanimity totally disappeared. Besides, Mrs. Mickle might have read that. What next, good heavens, what next? But the stream of cards soon made it plain that they were wandering in Tunisia—a Roman gateway at Tebessa, baths at Dougga, the anchors with which Noah anchored the ark from Kairouan, a Christian catacomb from Sousse, the lion's den in the amphitheatre from El Djem, the oasis of Gabes, the making of pottery in Djerba. Unexpectedly the inscription from the burial-place of Saints Felicitas and Perpetua at Carthage followed, and then Girgenti seen through stone-pines from the terrace of an hotel. St. Paul's Bay, Malta—"glorious bathing, a regular gay time here, with the fleet in"—Cairo. But they apparently fled from Egypt—"too hot now"—and Aubrey next received the Jaffa Gate from Jerusalem. Bewilderingly followed Haifa, Beirut, Tripoli, the ruins of the temple of Aphrodite from Cyprus, Tarsus—"no trace of St. Paul"—the fortifications of Rhodes, the ruins of Smyrna, Constantinople, and from Constantinople a letter. They had been away two and a-half months.

It was a long letter that began with explanations, if

they were explanations. Egypt had not only been hot : it had oppressed Ann, and Dick too, with a curious sense that the writer tried hard to define. " Devilish is the only word; Aubrey, though I don't believe in the devil. I fancy Ann thinks it's the spirits of an evil past, malignant, but she won't talk much." Anyway, they had taken an Italian steamer and had a most entertaining run up the Levant to Constantinople. There they had consistently sight-seen. Dick seemed most impressed by a Friday night's prayer in Saint Sophia. " The half-lit immense building, Aubrey, with those great staring Arabic names of God shroudded in gloom ; rows on rows of men rising and falling like the Guards at drill ; a little figure far away in the distance alone before the empty niche that looks towards Mecca ; and the guttural barbaric chanting of muezzins (I suppose they were muezzins) in a sort of pulpit. I don't know : it was all so pitiful. But it was amazingly '*Catholic*'—a history of religion. Cries, postures, mixed motives—half greed, half fear, half hope ; a sense of mystery, yes—you can't escape that, for the least grain of dust is a mystery ; but *emptiness*. Jehovah, Allah, • Buddha—whom you will ; it doesn't matter. There is no voice nor any that answers."

They were going on to Greece, and thence Dick talked with his friend and Aubrey read in amaze. " We've been trying ourselves out for two and a-half months, and there's only a fortnight left. We shall finish up in Athens and there review the whole. Purposely we haven't talked about our future, but I guess what Ann thinks, and I know my mind.

" Aubrey, Ann is a living miracle to me. I had thought God didn't exist, that miracles didn't happen, that life was difficult enough but probably purely mechanistic. Well, now, I know—what *do* I know ? Nothing about God, that is certain. He seems to me more certainly

a figment of our own imagination every day. The God of the dictionary I mean—a Figure, a Person, a Mind. There isn't any rhyme or reason in things, and—if there's been a Mind at work, then it's a damned nasty mind. This procession of peoples and places and histories has hammered that into me. Things have worked themselves out, that I'll allow, wherefore '*things*' are a wonder. But what's behind is simply inexplicable, utterly beyond our grasp, at least at present. I suspect we don't even begin to see straight, with our obviously absurd ideas of space and time and the like. If there's a pattern at all, we're too close to it to see what it is. So that's that.

"But Ann is bewildering. I begin to know her now. She's got heaps of faults—so have I, of course—and I think I pity her almost as much as I love her. We've lots in common, and lots more not in common. *Au fond*, she'd really rather dance than visit a museum. She hasn't an historical sense at all, and that's highly developed in me. Origins and ends—theology—don't really interest her at all. She really prefers luxury. She loves beauty, but I don't think she is prepared to suffer for it. She won't get up, normally, for a sunrise.

"*But*. Aubrey, Ann is more than ever the colossal note of interrogation in my life. Just as there is an end to all argument if one doesn't at least admit one's own identity—I am I—so, to me, it's fundamental that Ann is bound up in me. I love Ann as I did not know that love could be. I love her a thousand times more than I did in Kent. I love her in a way that I would not have called love three months ago. That my job is to shield her and learn of her and serve her and help her is as plain to me as my own identity. But whence comes Ann? I don't know! *Why* is Ann? I don't know! Into a universe tenanted only surely by myself, comes Ann. She hasn't brought me a bit nearer God, but she has

brought me slap up against reality. And a sort of reality I never dreamed of. What comes next, I haven't an idea. But I believe in miracles and Life is a mystery—because of Ann.

"The other thing, Aubrey, is beauty. You remember we talked of it? Well,—Lord, how hard it is to put!—I'm increasingly staggered by the beauty of things, and by this *fact*—for it is a fact—that the beauty of them is in *me* and not in them. In us. There is something in us that creates beauty, Aubrey, and beauty in everything. It has always been there, but Ann—or Love—has increased it in *me* a thousandfold and helped me to realise it. And if this power that creates beauty should go on and on until there was nothing ugly, if through perfect love we should create perfect beauty, what then, Aubrey? What other heaven could there be?

"Ecclesiastes III, 11, Aubrey. The most wonderful verse in the Bible. The bloke that wrote it has to talk about God—the Unknown—because of his age and conceptions, but he's got at the root of the matter for all that. 'Everything beautiful *in his time*.' The world *in our hearts*. With what result? A paraphrase might be: 'So that all men have to be agnostics about the universe from the beginning to the end.' But I'm not agnostic about Ann!"

Of course Aubrey got that effusion some considerable time later. The precise dates do not matter, but about that time Dick and Ann were seated side by side on the steps of the temple of Athena Nike on the Acropolis. Dick had been wandering alone in and out of the lovely fallen stones and the majestic remains, hot in the sun, but incredibly happy. "The Parthenon was opened for public worship about 438 B.C.," he read in his guide-book. How modern that sounded! And yet, somehow, here, with these flawless proportions and hewn loveliness, it

was hard to imagine sorrow and pain and sin. Did the Greeks build their temples as those of Christianity had been built because of such things, to be a refuge from such things? Or was it wholly otherwise? It seemed like it.

He came back to Ann, who had tired early and gathered a bunch of little yellow and blue wild flowers, and who was sitting with them in her hands to overlook the modern city. Far off was the blue of the Gulf of Ægina and the purple of Mount Hymettus. "Ann," he said, "I should like to build a temple like the Parthenon. I should like to make every stone of it lovely and joyful. There should be nothing heard in it but praise, and nothing exalted in it but Man. Only man, when he had gloried in his strength, should bow down before a single seed, a grain of sand, one of your wild flowers, and confess he was but a little child."

She turned her big eyes upon him and smiled. "Dear, silly old Dick," she said, "but you can build it, if you like, my dear."

He sat down, smiling. "What do you mean, my blessed one?"

She went on gravely: "Indeed you've begun to build it, Dick."

Still he did not understand. "You ridiculous child," he said.

She shook her head, and he saw, suddenly, there were tears in her eyes. "What is it, my sweetness?" he cried. "Are you over-tired? It's baking up here."

For a few seconds she did not reply. There was stillness and sunshine and beauty all about them. Then: "Dick, do you know our three months are up to-day?" she asked suddenly.

He solemnly instantly. "Yes. To-night. I meant to talk about it to-night."

"Need we wait for to-night? I've made up my mind, Dick."

Dick stirred restlessly. "There's such a lot to talk over," he said, "especially your side of it. It seems to me——"

"There's not so much, Dick, on my side. Indeed, you've said all that needs to be said. Do you know that you've begun to build the temple of your dreams in my heart already?"

"What!" cried Dick, turning to stare at her. And then he bowed his head in that temple and confessed he was but a little child.

CHAPTER IX

Vanishing Mists

I

It was, of course, practically inevitable under the circumstances that Penscott Hall should meet Harker's Orchard sooner or later, and after the triumphant departure of Dick and Ann poor Aubrey had gone for a month or two in absurd terror of his life. He had visions of a hectic Colonel Sinclair, very large, very beefy and very irate, holding him responsible for Dick's misdoings. But that summer passed into autumn and autumn into winter, and his fears were lulled to sleep. When, nearly a year later, he was invited to an early summer fête at Gadshunt Manor, designed to raise funds—or rather to make good funds already spent—for the renovation of Gadshunt Priory, he went without suspicion.

In point of fact he motored Mr. and Mrs. Burghley over in his car, and after the folk-dances and the first

half of the "Pageant of the Church in Kent" he was having tea as happily as the occasion and place made possible outside the big marquee beneath the beeches. It was Mrs. Burghley who was to blame, naturally. Her husband was predatory enough in his social instincts, but his wife's little finger was thicker than her spouse's loins. He, worthy man, was more than a little tired, having sustained the part of St. Dunstan under the tragic circumstances of an exceedingly inept devil, and for once would have been content to confine himself to his fruit salad; but Dunstan having been celibate on the stage, Mrs. Burghley was still untired and indefatigable. "Maurice," she whispered loud enough for Aubrey to hear her above the distant band, "there's Mr. Firbank and Mrs. Colonel Sinclair."

Aubrey, with incredible self-possession, put his tea-cup down on the grass that his retreat should not be hampered even for five seconds when the occasion served; Burghley, determined not to lose a section of peach, did not look up. "Where?" he muttered.

Mrs. Burghley was rightly incensed. "Over there. Coming towards us. Do get up and speak. And ask Mrs. Sinclair to the Girls' Friendly Society Festival. She's a patron of the Girl Guides, and you know you think the G.F.S. and the Guides ought to work together."

"All right, my dear, all right. . . . Ah, hullo, Firbank! Why, Mrs. Sinclair! How delightful to see you here."

"How do you do?" said Mildred, shaking hands. "How do you do, Mrs. Burghley? What does it feel like to have Saint Dunstan for a husband?"

They were all on their feet, and Aubrey perforce. Mrs. Burghley did her best and brightest. "How very nice to see you, Mrs. Sinclair. Where's the Colonel?"

Have you had tea? Oh, this is Mr. Linscott. Perhaps you haven't met. Mrs. Sinclair, Mr. Linscott. Mr.——"

Mildred held out a hand, aware of Aubrey's desire for flight and quite determined to prevent it. "We haven't met," she said, "but we should have done. We have friends in common. How do you do, Mr. Linscott?"

Aubrey said something, aware of a well-dressed woman, a pair of shrewd if lazy eyes and a fixed feminine resolution behind them. He became as a bird in the snare of a Fowler. Mrs. Burghley was impressed.

"Oh, how delightful!" (The little man really was worth cultivating.) "Mr. Linscott is a great help to my husband at Pickworth Hill. The houses all about us seem to be passing more and more into the hands of people who make a point of *not* attending church. I daresay it is the same at Waterhouses. Won't you sit down, Mrs. Sinclair? Maurice, do get Mrs. Sinclair a cup of tea. Really, it seems to be worse since the War."

"Allow me," said Aubrey, with courage, anticipating the hesitant Maurice—with great courage in reality, for he planned to send a boy scout with the tea and thereby himself escape on some flimsy excuse.

"Thank you," replied Mildred, all but omniscient, "and four cress sandwiches, Mr. Linscott. I should like five, but it's the fifth for which one always pays at dinner. I'll take your chair and keep it for you. We must have a chat. Thanks so much."

Aubrey had to return. He even brought five sandwiches, not without hope that Mildred might have spoken the truth. "They're very thin," he said apologetically.

Mildred proceeded to work miracles. In a few minutes she and Aubrey were sitting sufficiently apart from the rest, she at least in great comfort in an easy-chair. He was anchored with another cup of tea and a cigarette. An invisible moat cut off Mrs. Burghley, Mr. Burghley,

Mr. Firbank and two lady "workers" of Gadshunt. Mrs. Burghley occasionally threw glances across it much as Dives glanced at Father Abraham. Mrs. Sinclair was not less implacable than the patriarch.

With Aubrey she was perfectly frank. "I've been wanting to meet you, Mr. Linscott, ever since last June. I'm very fond of Ann, you know. And of course Mr. Thurstan interests me exceedingly. He is a friend of yours?"

"Yes," said Aubrey, "an old friend. We were boys together." Desperately, under fire of my lady's eyes, "a great friend."

"He's a Catholic priest?"

"He was," corrected Aubrey. "He's not now."

"I thought 'once a priest, always a priest'?"

Aubrey blushed. He believed he thought so too. But he found his loyalty involved.

"Mrs. Sinclair," he said, "Dick has left the Church. He left it himself because he lost his faith. Moreover the Church has definitely excommunicated him, and he is even less likely to return than he was a year ago. So I gather. He doesn't in any sense regard himself as a priest."

Mildred leaned back comfortably and continued to nibble sandwiches. "How fascinating," she said. "How does one lose one's faith, Mr. Linscott? It sounds thrilling. I'm certain I couldn't do it."

Aubrey was silent. It was not the kind of conversation at which he shone.

Mildred finished her sandwich and selected another. "But you must admit it's a most extraordinary affair," she said.

"Yes," said Aubrey, non-committally, but scarcely aware of his tone. He did not realise whither his partisanship had already led.

"You don't think so? Now *that's* interesting too. I gather from Ann that it was a case of love at first sight. But so incongruous, Mr. Linscott. Forgive me: you don't know Ann. I should never have supposed Ann could love a priest."

"Dick had ceased to be a priest. And—and—I could understand almost anybody falling in love with Dick."

"Could you? Me, for example? Dear me, I wish I had met him!"

Aubrey wriggled. "I—I——" he began. Then, firmly: "He was very much in love with Ann, I'm sure."

"He must have been. And she with him. But they had only met three times! Tom—he's my husband, you know—and I gave them about three weeks."

"They've been away nearly a year."

"I know. And at—at—that terrible Greek place. I never can remember the name."

"Nauplia."

"Yes. Thank you. Nauplia. Where *is* Nauplia, Mr. Linscott?"

"In the Peloponnesus," said Aubrey.

"You don't say so! But what does one *do* there, can you tell me that?"

"They took a house," replied Aubrey uncomfortably.

Mildred put her empty plate down, swept away an invisible crumb and moved her batteries distinctly nearer. "Please give me a cigarette," she said. "I daresay one oughtn't to smoke here, but I can't help it. I must have one. I want to make a desperate effort to understand this Nauplia business. And I assure you I need help."

Aubrey offered her his case and struck a match. Curiously, he began to feel slightly more at ease. Plainly the Sinclairs did not hold him to blame. Also he wanted to defend Dick. He was definitely aware of that now.

"Thanks," said Mildred. "Now we can really talk. How long's it going to last?"

"I gather neither intends to stop it."

"Yes. I know they say so. But— You have never married, Mr. Linscott?"

"No."

"Then—forgive me—it must be rather hard for you to understand. Marriage is a wonderful institution. It's a great help. Without it we should be in a dreadful state, I assure you. Look at all these most respectable people here. How many of them would stay put, as they rather fascinatingly say in America, if they weren't married?"

Aubrey smiled. "They wouldn't have started without it," he said.

"No. Of course not. That's the point. Mr. and Mrs. Burghley, for instance. Do you suppose Mrs. Burghley ever forgot, even when she was sweet and seventeen, that a pleasant vicarage in the country has its advantages? Or Mr. Burghley that he would need a housekeeper? And both have to be legally secured in case of accidents. People don't marry for love only; they aren't such fools. When they do, they nearly always end in the Divorce Court. Or they would if they could."

"I thought it was the other way on," objected Aubrey.

"I assure you it isn't. Else why marry? Unless, of course, you entirely lose your head. Love's a fleeting business. Besides, one can neither live on it nor sleep under it!"

"But surely most people still think of right and wrong in the matter, Mrs. Sinclair."

"That's interesting. You really think so? I should not have done so. Of public opinion, naturally. But there can't be many people left who really think the

parson or the registrar open and shut the gate of heaven. No, no, Mr. Linscott. I daresay a lot of us don't face it frankly, but we mainly marry because it's expected of us if we propose to set up with somebody else, and we mainly propose to set up with somebody else because we're tired of setting up alone. That's business, and it involves all kinds of considerations—his relations if you're a woman, the banking account, babies, what you'd be like at fifty if you didn't marry, and all the rest of it. So we want legal security. Love is the butter on the bread. Very nice, but disastrous without it—the bread, I mean."

"I'm afraid I don't look at it like that," said Aubrey, a trifle stiffly.

"Really? Then you're a most dangerous person, Mr. Linscott. You'll be taking a leaf out of this turbulent Dick's book next! Love for love's sake!—sheer anarchy, I assure you. But the point is that I can't imagine Ann's believing it. Or for long, anyway."

Aubrey felt, somehow, that she had got him twisted up. He wasn't supporting Dick to that extent. Heavens, if it got about that—that——! "I—er—I," he stammered.

The shrewd eyes twinkled. "Well, you and I don't much matter, do we, Mr. Linscott? What we're really trying to talk about is Ann and Dick. Here are two people who meet, and apparently lose their heads entirely. They're both people of whom you wouldn't expect it—a priest and Ann. Perhaps especially Ann. You see, the poor child had made some disastrous experiments. Now what I want to know is what's to happen when they find them again? Their heads, I mean. And what are we going to do about it?"

"Perhaps they never will," suggested Aubrey.

"Of course they will. They'll have to. Ann's got nothing, and I gather he hasn't either. Even at—at—

whatever's the place ?—they can't live for ever on nothing. And, besides, they've left there already."

Aubrey was startled. "No," he cried, "have they ? I hadn't heard that."

"I got a letter from Ann yesterday. They're travelling again."

"Why? I haven't heard from Dick for a month or more."

"Exactly, why ? Well, I'll tell you what I think. This—oh, heavens, *what* is it ?"

"Nauplia."

"Yes, this Nauplia. It appeared to be a kind of paradise in last year's letters, didn't it ? I expect yours were the same as mine. Sea and snow-clad mountains and ancient ruins and a funny little cottage with a lovely garden under the shadow of the Acropolis—wasn't that it ? I looked up Acropolis. Why it's shadow should be so pleasant, I don't know. Or at least I do know, and that's the point. Ann was being quite happy on the butter, Mr. Linscott. She would be. She was romantic. We'll suppose she was genuinely in love. And they say Greece is lovely in the autumn. They picnicked, you remember, in a lion gate somewhere. And there was a field of asphodel at some place mentioned by Homer. As if Ann could care for a year about Homer ! I marvel it's lasted as long, I tell you that."

Aubrey was genuinely startled. He forgot the fête. Indeed they both did. The stirring scenes of the Pageant of the Church in Kent passed them by. And Mrs. Burghley, departing at last, tried to bow at least to Mildred and wasn't noticed. As a result—such are the consequences of our least action or omission—St. Dunstan found a much more lively devil to deal with when he got home.

But to return to Aubrey. "Dick's letters haven't hinted at any such things," he said.

"Of course not. Probably he hasn't noticed it. Ann hasn't said anything either for that matter. That doesn't make any difference."

"But where have they gone, then?"

"Back to Athens. A big hotel. Ann is revelling in the dancing. She's got two new frocks into the bargain. It seems there are decent shops in Athens, though I shouldn't have believed it myself."

"What's Dick doing?"

"The National Museum of Antiquities. And very happy, Ann says."

"Well," began Aubrey, quite at sea.

"Well, and who is dancing with Ann? That's the point. You don't dance alone, Mr. Linscott."

"Probably they've made friends," defended Aubrey feebly.

"Probably," said Mildred, sarcastically.

There was a little silence. In the distance a fanfare announced the entrance of Henry VIII. The crowd cheered—enthusiastically. It was aware that it could do that, at any rate. Besides, Henry VIII was stuffed with a cushion and waddled well. And there was a faint air of naughtiness about the presence of Ann Boleyn. The Vicar had been all for Katherine of Aragon, but History was inexorable: *she* had not mothered the Reformation.

"You see," said Mildred at last, "marriage is best. It's safer. If they were married, I shouldn't be worrying."

Aubrey was suddenly grateful to her. It dawned on him that here was a real friend. Under the admirable exterior and under the bantering talk, Mildred Sinclair was a friend of Ann. And therefore of Dick. "But you do worry," he said, earnestly.

Mildred's gaze met his. She smiled. "Yes," she said, "I do. I'm very fond of Ann, Mr. Linscott. And I

know her. Or I think I do. I can see Ann shopping in Athens after six months of Nauplia. 'The flowers that bloom in the Spring, tra-la'! Your Dick may be a wonderful person, but he isn't going to change Ann in six months. No one could. And I'm not any too sure that he's trying."

"He's very much in love. And"—Aubrey did not know how to put it—"and he thinks it has—well—er—opened his eyes. He's an idealist, at heart, Mrs. Sinclair. It's absurd to call Dick an agnostic."

"Worse and worse," said Mildred. "I'd hoped he was. Then Ann would have got round him and they'd have got married in the end. All agnostics do—that's why there are still such a lot of marriages. But if he's *religious*—I thought you said he'd 'lost his faith.' Doesn't that mean his religion?"

Aubrey stared at her. His thoughts were beginning to go off on their own tack. He made an effort to recall them. "I think, perhaps, he's changing," he said.

"Changing? How? You don't mean he's likely to go back to the Church? You've said already——?"

"Oh, no. Not that. But I think he's getting back to some sort of faith."

Mildred gestured. "Mr. Linscott, all that's beyond me. I told you you were dangerous. If you sympathise with that sort of thing, I ought, positively, to dig Tom out of the billiard-room. Some sort of faith! Why people can't remain Church of England respectably, I never could understand. What'll he do then? Found a new religion?"

"God forbid!" cried Aubrey, genuinely.

"But He has so little influence. If only Ann would——"

"I believe Ann is part of his religion."

"Then what in the world is he doing in a Museum of Antiquities?"

Aubrey gave it up. "I don't know," he said, hopelessly.

Mildred regarded him with curiosity. He was a pleasant little man, she thought, and somehow very likeable. He was as transparent as a babe. Certainly this Dick, whatever he was, was no villain of the piece. Mildred, watching Aubrey, began even to feel a bit sorry for Dick. Probably, like Aubrey himself, he was one of those people who ought not to be loose in a sensible world. She sighed, and reached for her parasol. "We've sat here an unconscionable time," she said. "I ought to be going. But I'm very glad we've met. Come and see me, Mr. Linscott."

Aubrey stood up. "I'd like to," he said, "but——"

"You needn't mind Tom. He's tame enough, though he growls ferociously. And don't come on a Thursday. I want to talk."

"I will," said Aubrey, "but, but, Mrs. Sinclair, just one thing. What will you do if they come back?"

Mildred frowned. "It'll be damned awkward," she said, "but there'll be no help for it. I'm not going back on Ann. I'll take her in, and her parson with her, though Tom swears the roof off."

Aubrey recalled something Dick had said about the testing of friends. But he was in haste to say something else, to be quite sure of something at least.

"Oh, but they'll come to me," he cried. "Really, Mrs. Sinclair. I've heaps of room. Harker's Orchard is just the place for them."

Mildred held out her hand, her eyes smiling. "I'll come and see," she said. "May I? Next week? We'll spend a delicious afternoon, conspiring together to set Mrs. Burghley by the ears!"

II

Mildred came, four days later. Mrs. Mickle was overjoyed. She was one of those good-natured souls who never consider their own interests, and it did not strike her that if her master's bachelordom ever ended, her undisputed authority would end also. Therefore she deplored almost openly Aubrey's withdrawal from society. Mrs. Burghley occasionally crossed the doorstep, and the lady from "next door," but neither found approval in Mrs. Mickle's eyes. The one plainly criticised everything in the house, including its inmates, and the other was a mannish person who usually called on business—to suggest they shared the expense of cutting the hedge between them or to complain of Felix in connection with her chickens. But Mildred found favour at once. Thus, although Aubrey was half-asleep in a steamer-chair on the tennis-court and it would have been safe to presume that he wished to be out, she descended and awoke him. "A *lady* to see you, sir," she said emphatically.

"Who is it?" demanded Aubrey, alarmed.

Mrs. Mickle produced the card, but it was unnecessary. Mildred had followed her. "I say," she called from the top of the winding path that led down to the tennis-court, "may I come down? Mr. Linscott, what a *lovely* place."

They very rapidly became friends. Aubrey returned her call, informally as she had suggested. Then Mildred came again, to bear down his opposition and ask him to dinner. He had to meet Tom. True, she could not be sure that Tom would be there even if he came to dinner, but probably he would turn up, at least in the course of the evening.

In point of fact, the Colonel was secretly interested.

He swore a little, naturally, at his wife for an action which committed them still more deeply in the affair of Ann, and he called on his Maker to support him in his contention that any friend of a renegade priest must be a blackguard. "Tom, you're talking more nonsense than usual ; go and change!" said Mildred.

"If the affair comes up, I shall say exactly what I think of it," he growled.

"Naturally. And I've already warned Aubrey that what you are in the habit of calling thought has nothing to do with your little used but quite sound intelligence, my dear."

"Damn it all, Mildred! He's Aubrey already, is he?"

"My dear Tom, do try and be reasonable. He naturally says 'Ann' and I naturally say 'Dick.' What would be the sense of remaining formal?"

"Every Tom, Dick and Harry——"

"No, dear. And Aubrey," said Mildred sweetly. "Now *do* go and dress!"

They were sitting on the terrace when Aubrey arrived. Mildred introduced them. "Aubrey, this is Tom. Tom, this is Mr. Linscott of Harker's Orchard. And don't talk War."

Aubrey held out his hand. He looked particularly chubby, dressed. "Glad to know you," said the Colonel, without cordiality. "My dear Mildred, why the devil should we?"

"You were in the same Division in France, you know," said Mildred, imperturbably.

"Gad! The Seventh! You don't say so! What was yours?"

"Second Queens, Royal West Surrey," said Aubrey, blushing. "The twenty-second Brigade—General Lawford."

"The deuce it was. Mine was the twentieth, Ruggles-Brise. First Grenadiers. 'Member the Menin Road?"

"Not likely to forget it, sir," said Aubrey, smiling.

"Gad, no. Sorry we haven't met before. Have a sherry and bitters before dinner?"

"Thanks. But I keep fairly quiet at Harker's Orchard. Decent people about, of course, but somehow——"

"Same here. The country's not what it was. Let's see, that November, we went back to Locre, and the twenty-second—humph—Bailleul, wasn't it?"

"Yes, Bailleul. But I wasn't there. I was knocked out at Gheluvelt."

"Excuse me a minute, Aubrey," interrupted Mildred.

"Tom, only one more sherry!"

"Damned cute woman, my wife," said Tom, genially, when she had gone into the house. "Try those olives. Fancy knowing you were in the Seventh and never letting on! Didn't tell you, either, I suppose?"

Aubrey shook his head. It was a Spanish olive, and very big at that.

Not that the Colonel came to matter much to Aubrey; it was Mildred who affected him curiously. You got to the bottom of Tom without any difficulty, especially if you had been in the same Division, even as a mere subaltern. Tom had been brought up in an ordered and limited world, wherein everything had its time and place and one was concerned only with one's duty. He and his had held the Channel Ports from the German hordes with gallantry that is written where he who runs may read, but they had not been able to preserve their England from a more insidious invasion. Nor were they trained to deal with it now that it had come. Before disorder and the infinite, Colonel Sinclair, and the men of his time and generation, had had to retire. And the *Morning Post* had closed over his head.

But Mildred was different. She was very far from retiring. Vastly alive, she did not despair of the Republic. Of her attitude to things in general Aubrey inquired little, however; what impressed him was the curious fact that she supported institutions because she did not believe in them. And supported them with some vigour for all her apparent carelessness. Thus she dragged Tom to church practically every Sunday morning and lent her name and money to such of the Establishment's good works as her Vicar brought before her notice. She was perfectly straightforward about it. "Good heavens, my dear Aubrey, if I believed in the Apostle's Creed, I couldn't possibly attend Matins! Who could? The very thought of it makes me shiver. The Apostle's Creed, I mean. Think of those great thundering phrases and what they imply. If the choir didn't play up and down it so prettily, one couldn't bear it, even as it is. That's the best of Anglican music: it hides things up so nicely. Like the Psalms: all the nasty phrases run together as quickly as possible in one long-drawn hum."

"Well, of course," Aubrey had said, "I think the Eucharist ought to be the principal service of the day, but what's the matter with Matins, anyway, Mildred?"

"My dear Aubrey! Dear Mr. Firbank in his surplice! Have you ever *seen* him? And Tom and I and all the rest of us monotoning the miserable sinners. And the *nice* choir-boys. And the cheery, happy hymns that don't mean anything at all. And Jehu piling the heads of the sons of Ahab up in a jolly heap like cannon-balls. And the Mothers' Union will meet at half-past-three in the vicarage. And St. Paul rumbling away about Hagar and Ishmael and women dishonouring their heads. And——"

"My dear Mildred!"

"You see, Aubrey, that's the worst of people like your

Dick. They're so infernally logical. And so selfish. I know exactly why Ann fell to him. She's so horribly honest herself. She really behaved *dreadfully* with Carew. What in the world did she expect the poor man to do? He gave her a house and his name and social interests and I've no doubt did his best to give her a son into the bargain. It wasn't his fault that he failed. As for a romantic kind of love, he hadn't got that to give. One understands Ann wanting it. But one doesn't pull down the whole house because one wants to alter the furnishings of the bedroom. Oh, I'm sorry, Aubrey. Say drawing-room, then. It'll fit the metaphor just as well and spare your blushes."

Aubrey tried to change the subject. "You shouldn't go to Matins, then," he said severely.

"Why not, pray? The Church is an excellent institution. Like the King. They're both logically absurd, but absolute pillars of the State. The existence of the King makes Lloyd George tolerable. I daresay he would preserve us in the event of Ramsay Macdonald. He even does more than that, Aubrey: he makes it possible for gentlemen like them to do a certain amount of good in the world. They can't chuck *everything* overboard, and so they confine themselves to the more obvious dirt. And yet monarchy in England, as you know quite well, my dear, is a legal fiction."

"And God?" asked Aubrey.

"Aubrey, we'll have tea. You *must* learn not to talk to me about certain subjects."

But Aubrey talked to himself, and to Felix. Up and down the lawn every morning, while the ever-increasing battalions of the London-Paris and Paris-London air service seemed just to clear the trees of Saxon Top ere they sailed out over the gulf of the Weald, he began to ask himself if Mildred was not, after all, right, to some

extent, in her very error. If God were God, might He not ask more of Aubrey than a pleasant life in Harker's Orchard? Might not, after all, certain trappings of religion be in danger of becoming realities to him? Dick had said that he, Aubrey, had furnished his own house, to suit his own taste, and that a Catholic had to accept a house furnished for him. There might be something in that, thought Aubrey. Suppose he had even made him a God to suit himself. After the War, especially. The cannon of the Ypres salient had made his old life intolerable; yes, but had he not fashioned for himself a new one? Had he ever dared to face the realities of life?

He determined to go to town again and see Haynes.

III

Aubrey did not realise it, but he was less hurried these days, and that not because he was growing older. Thus, in the morning, he heard Mrs. Mickle come out of her bedroom to go downstairs and he called to her. She came to his door and opened it a little. "Yes, sir?" she said.

"I shall go to Town this morning, Mrs. Mickle," said Aubrey, lazily.

"Yes, sir. What time, sir?"

"I don't know exactly. The ten-forty-five or the eleven-thirty probably. Will you tell Hedge to have a look at the car?"

"You'll be back to dinner, Mr. Linscott?"

"I expect so. But don't bother about anything hot. I may be late."

"All right, sir. Breakfast as usual, sir?"

"Yes. In half an hour, Mrs. Mickle."

"Thank you, sir."

The door closed discreetly, but Aubrey lay on still in bed, thinking about Haynes. He would take him by surprise: drop in for lunch. The eleven-thirty would do excellently for that. Haynes could usually take an afternoon off. Aubrey thought he would rather like to get him out of the parish. They might stroll along the Embankment and drop into St. Paul's for evensong. There was a fairly good train back from Charing Cross.

But what did he want to say to Haynes? He was hanged if he knew! "Haynes, if God is God—GOD—don't you think we're rather fooling with things?" But was Haynes fooling with things? He was a perfectly energetic clergyman. He was probably at this moment saying Mass while he, Aubrey, lay in bed. He was an indefatigable visitor. He trained the servers, and had a most successful Guild for them. He had written and published a "Server's Manual for Low Mass." One couldn't say that Haynes—

Yet Aubrey had his doubts. He was beginning to glimpse vaguely a state of affairs in which Haynes, and even the Church of the Transfiguration itself, played a curiously unreal part. Mildred's scornful trenchant mind, Dick's uncompromising clarity, Ann's elemental grasping at life, even Hedge's and Mrs. Mickle's steady performance of obvious duties—all these seemed to Aubrey more real than Haynes' Guild of Altar Servers. But he did not quite know why. And then he had a bright idea: he would let Haynes show him, if so be there was anything to show.

He got out of bed and surveyed the prospect from his window from force of habit. The sun was already flooding the garden. The great pines on Chipping Wold were wonderfully clear. But Aubrey's round face puckered as he stared. It was odd how impersonal it all seemed. Maddeningly so. One couldn't get *into* it.

You could do nothing with beauty except look at it. When you tried to grasp it, to feed on it, to—to— (Aubrey's mind groped for words) to *appropriate* it, it eluded you. Unsatisfactory. There was a mystery somewhere.

Aubrey sighed and made for his bath. There was a sense in which you could appropriate hot water as you could not appropriate pure beauty. That fellow Brooke seemed to have realised that. He had been a "great lover" of—well, what?

"The benison of hot water; furs to touch;
The good smell of old clothes, and other such,
The comfortable smell of friendly fingers . . ."

Aubrey could not remember more consequentially, but, shaving, phrases returned to him. "The rough male kiss of blankets." "Many-tasting food." "Royal flames." "New-peeled sticks." "Rainbows," though. But taking it all in all, Brooke's category implied tasting, touching, smelling, handling, more than merely seeing. And when he did see, he saw with—with——

Aubrey's classical education helped him out. That was it: in that poem, anyway, Brooke was a Grecian. "The note of directness." The Greeks all but invariably took things at their face value. They were anthropomorphic in their religion but not in their poetry—which was almost to say their practical life. They were far from attributing human emotions to a seagull or a heavenly spirit to a skylark. A wave breaking on the sea-shore was a wave breaking on the sea-shore and not a manifestation of God for the encouragement of mortals. But then Haynes——

Aubrey gave it up. He had ended by condemning himself, not Haynes. Haynes had gone to London to face the facts of life. But what had he done? He had

come to Harker's Orchard to see God comfortably in the view from his windows. Whereas Haynes had gone to Westminster to see God in the slums. Aubrey sighed, and slightly cut himself. It was all very difficult.

He had not heard the postman, but there was a letter from Dick on his breakfast table. For all that, he ate his bacon and eggs before he opened it: he disliked cold bacon. But with the toast and marmalade he read Dick thoughtfully.

Hedge passed the open French window. "Morning, sir," he said.

Aubrey looked up. "That you, Hedge? Morning. I say, have you looked at the car? I want to run round by Waterhouses on my way to the station."

"I'll go at once, sir. Mrs. Mickle said you'd catch the ten-forty-five or eleven-thirty."

"Yes. The eleven-thirty. But I've had a letter I want to talk over with Mrs. Sinclair at Penscott Hall. I'll have to start half an hour earlier at least. Has she plenty of petrol?"

"I'll see, sir. I shan't be ten minutes, Mr. Linscott."

"Oh, there's plenty of time."

Aubrey found Mildred in the rose garden with a small pair of pruning shears. She was snipping off old blooms and dead leaves. "Hullo! You're bright and early," she said.

"Well, it's a topping morning. Besides, I'm going to London. Have you heard from Ann?"

"No. Have you?"

"Yes. From Dick, anyway. They're coming home."

Mildred snipped a white bud and held it out to him.

"Here's a buttonhole," she said. "Cheer up London."

He took it, smiling. "Thanks. But, I say, it's rather exciting."

"When do they arrive?"

"Not yet. They're apparently making a grand tour again. As a matter of fact Dick's letter was posted at Salonica. They're going through Belgrade, Budapest, Vienna, Prague. They're going to stay a while in each place. Then do South Germany. He says Ann wants to see Rothenberg especially. Expect them about September, he says."

"Humph! And what then, pray?"

"A cottage in Sussex. He's going to write."

"The refuge of the distressed. As a matter of fact, I don't know what else he *could* do. Teach, but no one would take an ex-priest. I don't suppose he'd be any good in business. Write what?"

"He doesn't say."

"And a cottage in Sussex! Bless the man! Doesn't he know it's easier to find a castle in Spain?"

"Of course they'll stay with me till they find it. I think it's not a bad idea. I can motor them round. I daresay we shall find something. But that's unimportant."

"What is important, then? Out with it, Aubrey."

"Well," retorted Aubrey, "you're wrong. About the dancing, I mean. They're coming home together, to settle down together. Heavens, but I'll be glad to see them?"

Mildred smiled at his burst of enthusiasm. Then she shrugged her shoulders. "For all that, Ann in a cottage— How many times have I to tell you you don't know Ann, Aubrey?"

Aubrey stood in the path and stared at her reflectively. "You don't know Dick," he said at last.

Mildred sighed. "I don't," she said. "He certainly seems a surprising young man. But I doubt very much if he'll get on with Tom. He wasn't in the Seventh Division, was he?"

"No," said Aubrey, solemnly.

"Well, they needn't see much of each other. Stay to lunch, Aubrey."

"Can't. I'm going to lunch with a friend."

"You're very tiresome. Tom is in a fearful temper and won't go to Town. You're always restful, and you will. Who is it, Aubrey? A lady?"

"Father Haynes, of the Transfiguration, Westminster."

"Horrors! My dear, how *can* you do these things? The Transfiguration! Don't stay on the Mount, anyway, Aubrey. I should miss you."

"I don't think it's the least likely, Mildred. But I ought to go."

"All right. I'll walk with you to the gate. Then I must go and put on a hat. There's a committee at the Vicarage to arrange for the Girl Guides' Camp."

"I never can imagine you on committees."

"Can't you? I assure you I'm the one practical member. I nearly always manage to have Boy Scouts in the neighbourhood."

Aubrey smiled. "What does Mrs. Firbank say to that?"

"She never knows till it's too late. The Church never does. And thus the World goes on, my friend."

"You're incorrigible, Mildred."

"And you ought to be married, Aubrey. You'd make a nice husband. I think I shall begin to arrange it."

"For heaven's sake! Good-bye, Mildred."

"Good-bye. And tell the Transfiguration to change its name. It's too ecstatic for England."

Aubrey grinned. "I'll tell Haynes that," he said. "They pride themselves on their Anglicanism."

"Then they're ostriches," called Mildred, as the car slipped away

Mildred had perhaps supplied him with the right word, thought Aubrey.

He reached Victoria without adventure and in perfect agreement with the Southern Railway. Walking to Westminster, London seemed to him rather more cheerful than usual. There were bright flowers in the baskets about the Clock Tower. The campanile of the Cathedral suggested gaiety and Southern Italy. The Stores had a brisk air, as if the old city were wide awake. The scarlet of the General omnibuses flaunted bravely in the face of the sombre citizens who rode upon them. Aubrey smiled at an advertisement which set dainty shoes and a large expanse of stocking to the body of an elderly gentleman in a silk hat on the top of one. But the bus stopped at the turning to the Transfiguration and the elderly gentleman got off.

He indeed followed Aubrey between the costers' carts, though the little man was sublimely oblivious of the fact. He turned where Aubrey turned, a few seconds later. Aubrey was waiting for the door of the clergy house to be opened when he came up the steps.

"Is Father Haynes at home?" asked Aubrey of the smiling housemaid.

"I think so, sir. Will you come in?" And she looked enquiringly at the elderly gentleman.

The elderly gentleman glanced at Aubrey as one who would say: What are *you* doing with Father Haynes? and then, in his turn, addressed himself to the housemaid. "Father Haynes is expecting me to lunch. Lord Carew."

The smiling housemaid ceased to smile. "Certainly, sir," she said, impressed.

Aubrey was already in the hall; indeed, for the housemaid had the door of the parlour opened before he had collected his wits, he was caged with Carew in the parlour before he was aware of it. Then, the full horror of the

situation growing upon him, he turned impulsively. "Er—I——" he began. The door closed in his face.

Lord Carew was plainly at home. He put his hat on the table and walked to the window whence he surveyed the flagged front-yard that might, in happier circumstances, have been a rose garden or an Italian loggia. As for Aubrey, he retained his hat and slowly grew red and rosy. He could think of nothing save escape. He could think of no means of escape except a dash for the front door of which he was not capable. He was still undecided when Haynes entered.

"Hullo, Aubrey! Delighted to see you. What are you doing in town?"

"Er—Gerald—I fear——"

"Good morning, Carew. How goes things? (They shook hands.) You must have arrived with my friend here, who buries himself in the country and only appears unexpectedly once in a blue moon. I don't think you've met. Lord Carew—Mr. Linscott. Aubrey—Lord Carew."

"How do you do?" said his lordship, politely.

"Very well, thank you," said Aubrey, cursing himself. Then, boldly: "I say, Gerald, I came to beg a lunch, but I overheard—— Perhaps——" His courage failed him.

"Delighted to have you. We've always a place for an unexpected guest. And the Vicar will look after you for an hour or so after lunch, till I'm free. Lord Carew's business won't take longer."

A gong boomed. Haynes addressed his visitors collectively. "Like a wash? Just come this way."

"After you," said Carew to Aubrey, in the door.

Aubrey led the way.

Washing their hands and disclosing that he lived in Kent on the borders of Sussex, that his roses were poor

this year, that he had an excellent gardener, and that he had motored to Broad Chalke, Aubrey was furiously thinking. After all he had small cause for alarm. Haynes knew Dick, but he had met him but once. He did not know of Dick-cum-Ann unless Lord Carew knew Dick's name and had told him. Which was unlikely. The divorce made it unlikely. And if he had, Gerald would surely have written to him about it.

Therefore he had only to keep quiet and not take risks when Dick was in England. Or tell Haynes one day and leave it to him to see that nothing untoward occurred afterwards. Meanwhile he would see from what sort of a husband Ann had fled. And he would find out what Lord Carew thought of the Church of the Transfiguration.

He sat opposite him at lunch and had his opportunity. Lord Carew was tall, slightly bald, placid. He had a big dome of a forehead, but small eyes. He ate gravely, with attention. He was courteous, but uninteresting. He seemed familiar with the clergy-house. He did not require to be introduced to any of the priests. It appeared he was at least near the inner circle in politics and that he was well aware of it.

There was no clerical small-talk. Instead the Irish question came in, as it were, with the roast—inevitably that year. The Vicar was confident that the religious difficulty was at the bottom of it. Rome. That being so, and Rome having still a curiously firm hand over the people, Rome was responsible for the burning constabularies and the violence of the Black and Tans. What was wanted was an absolutely firm hand. No shilly-shallying. A plain statement to America.

It was really rather difficult to see how the Government could make their hand firmer, thought Lord Carew.

Haynes thought not. The Black and Tans were a

mistake. Regular troops were needed. Martial law. An economic blockade. What did Aubrey think?

Aubrey wasn't sure. (In other words he was quite sure.) After all, the War had been fought for the independence of the smaller nations.

But Ireland was not a nation, someone interjected. You couldn't say it was. The Irish peasants were not all there were of Irishmen. There were as many Irishmen in England and the Colonies who called themselves "British" as Irishmen in Ireland who refused the title.

Carew was of the opinion that Dominion Status would be conceded. His own idea, of course, nothing official.

That Vicar thought that, after what had taken place, that would be a disgraceful surrender. The end of the Empire.

And so on, rather interminably. Aubrey watched and listened, his thoughts running on new lines. These were clergymen: would Christ have wished for a firm hand—regular troops? He was amazed at himself. But if Christ were Christ, what, after all, did the Empire matter? The Kingdom of God was more important. And yet—

Chairs were pushed back, cigarettes lit with the coffee. Haynes excused himself, and left with Lord Carew, who shook hands all round. The Vicar took him to his study and showed him some new vestments. At last Haynes returned. "Sorry to have had to go away, Aubrey," he said. "Come to my room."

"Well," Aubrey hesitated, "are you busy this afternoon? Let's stroll along the Embankment and talk. I want exercise."

"Sorry. I've only an hour or so." Haynes took his arm. "Come and chat, and we'll have an early tea. Will that do?"

It did not quite do. Aubrey did not know why, but

the universe seemed out of joint. He felt curiously a stranger, and the more so, perhaps, when, the door being shut, Haynes plumped at once into the affair Carew.

"Awkward business that, of Lord Carew," he said, taking up a pipe.

"Eh?" queried Aubrey, on tenterhooks.

Haynes noticed nothing. "You must have seen it in the papers," he said, "a year ago. The divorce. The poor fellow was married to an impossible wife."

"Really?"

"Yes. One of these young modern women who seem to have no restraint or decency left. Left him, in defiance of his wishes, for so-called war work in France. In point of fact, for the sort of thing you and I saw there too often. She committed adultery with an officer in Paris. Was forced to confess it at the trial. Then gadded off to Africa, though Carew had offered to overlook it. One has nothing but sympathy for him."

"But how do you come to know him?"

"Oh, as a matter of fact the Vicar met him during the War on some committee or another. Got him to come to the church. He's a sidesman now. A very decent fellow really. He likes our ceremonial. Essentially English."

"I see," said Aubrey.

"It's one of those difficult cases," went on Haynes, leaning back comfortably. "Of course, divorce is out of the question: the Church forbids it, and there's an end. But it doesn't forbid a separation, and in a sense that was all that this divorce was from Carew's point of view. He was innocent and she was guilty. He offered reconciliation and she refused. And it does seem that some idea of the freedom of the innocent party lies behind Saint Matthew's guarded statement. Of course it has to be read with Saint Mark and interpreted by the

Tradition of the Church. But I think the Vicar was right in not refusing him the sacraments."

Aubrey said nothing, and Haynes tried to change the subject. "Well, and how goes it with you, old man?"

Aubrey ignored that. "But if he wanted to marry again?" he asked.

Haynes looked at him sharply. "Curiously, that's the point," he said. "Of course it is entirely between you and me. He does want to."

"And what does the Vicar say to that?"

"I wonder you ask. You are a Catholic yourself. It is naturally impossible."

"Meaning he is still married to Ann?"

"Ann? Do you know her, Aubrey?"

Aubrey flushed. As usual, he could not hide the truth, or part of it. "I know friends of hers," he said.

"Who have put you up to her side of the question?"

"Is that the point, Gerald? I'm asking you. You say, definitely, that he is still married to his divorced wife?"

"Is there a doubt? 'They are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.'"

"But look here, Gerald. Did God ever join them together? Look facts in the face. The disparity of their ages, the difference in temperament, the——"

"My dear Aubrey, they were married in Saint Margaret's, Westminster. She was not unwilling and she knew what she was about. What other facts are there to look in the face?"

"The facts of life."

"Aubrey, honestly, do you realise what you are saying? Probably you don't mean what you imply. That's exactly the kind of sentimental modern rubbish we are out to fight. The facts of life are sin, redemption,

the Sacraments of the Church, Heaven, Hell. The Church stands for them, and will stand for them. Why, thank God, Carew himself, a typical Englishman, has come to see that."

"Has he?"

"Yes. Again between ourselves. He has decided not to marry again. I wonder if you realise, Aubrey, the extent to which the Church is winning back England to the Faith? I could tell you of a dozen prominent converts—for that is the only word one ought to use—recently. We don't advertise, as Rome does, of course, but if you knew——"

Aubrey listened for the hour that Haynes could give him. They parted friends, but as Aubrey walked to the station he was genuinely bewildered. Mildred was right.

The particular matter that Haynes had talked about mattered not at all. It had chanced to come up, that was all. Aubrey knew, now, that almost any subject would have done. The point was that Haynes was simply living in a fool's paradise. He was not, of course, totally alone there; indeed the tragedy of it lay in the fact that he was good enough spokesman for his Church. "England returning to the Faith!" Haynes and his friends honestly believed that, with, literally, seventy-five per cent. of the country totally outside all religious denominations and the greater part of the remainder Tom and Mildred Sinclairs. But why wonder at that? The facts of life to Haynes were dogmas that thundered only in his imagination, that had scared thinking people scarcely at all for a century, that were fast ceasing to convince even the unlearned and the simple. For the first time Aubrey saw how wonderful the vision must have been to Dick when Ann came stepping, all flesh and blood and laughter, out of the vanishing mists.

CHAPTER X

Revelation

I

BUT Mildred had also been more correct in her fears than Aubrey had then guessed.

Dick and Ann had come up from Nauplia to the Hotel de la Grande-Bretagne, all gilt and palms and efficiency, with its swing-doors giving on to a spacious lounge where one inevitably subsided at once into a big easy-chair, picked up *The Tailer*, found a waiter at one's elbow, and ordered a cocktail. Their bedroom looked across the Place de la Constitution to the Royal Palace, and in the evening, with the electric lights a-shining and taxis speeding through cool distances, after Nauplia it was a second Paris.

To Ann Nauplia had been at first a lovely kind of dream. They had taken rooms overlooking the waterfront, and she had been able happily to sit for hours at a time on a couch in the window watching the fisher-boats, the play of light and shade over the fortress-island in the bay and the ever-changing outline of the mountains on the farther side. Then it had been jolly to wander with Dick round the walls of the old fortifications, or to climb to the rock-fastness of Palamidi (where one looked across the ramparts at the prisoners and bought quaint carved dolls and trinkets, for all the world as if Nauplia were Edinburgh and the vendor St. Ives). They had rambled about the ancient harbour castle of Itsh-Kaleh, while Dick had discoursed of Palamedes and told stories of the glories of Venice that were conjured up by the Lion of St. Mark built anywhere and anyhow into the fortifications. Housekeeping had been fun, so far as there had been any housekeeping to do, and the wrinkled smiling

Andromache who looked after them had enough English to convey her admiration and her conviction (amusing at first) that Nauplia was no place for the beautiful English lady. Athens, now . . .

Then there had been long days at places which involved delightful drives about the pleasant countryside, with its wild flowers and its olive trees and its ancient shrines and its quaint monasteries. The places themselves, with terrible names, had been amusing so long as Dick let her sit in the shade after a very cursory inspection and had told her stories of ancient Greece. But they had become more monotonous when he had pottered for hours among the fallen stones and with immense care and deliberation had planned and taken his photographs. All Ann knew or wanted to know of photography consisted of "snapshots." Half the fun lay in discovering—often with difficulty—what one actually *had* taken when the prints returned from the photographers. But that had not been Dick's idea. Whole evenings, on the contrary, he had spent in the darkened bathroom. And, admittedly, there had not been much to read.

Nor had there been much for them to do when he had not been in the bathroom, in point of fact. The Platia Syntagmatos—she had mastered that name to Andromache's great delight—had been fun at first: the queer resinous wine one drank at the little cafés, the absurd orchestra, the queerly-dressed folk, the strange sound of Greek, Dick's attempts with what he remembered of the Classics; but it had palled. As to the Museum, with the Curator of which Dick had struck up a friendship, frankly, before long, she loathed it and its guardian together. Sewing had kept her fairly busy, while Dick wrote, especially the native embroideries that the rather sour-faced daughter of Andromache taught her none too willingly; but Ann was not used to long hours with

a needle. After all, her world had opened with the War and had never settled down. Increasingly she would talk War with Dick, or at least leaves and happenings in France well behind the lines that, in retrospect, were curiously rosy-coloured. Towards the end, she even found herself half-sorry that one could not, once more, cross in a leave boat to Boulogne or have a "quiet" dinner with a few officers at Le Havre.

But it had been a wonderful six months. Ann had not thought that there was anybody in the world quite like Dick. He had overawed her a little at first, because she thought he knew so much, but she had come, in quiet moments, to be overwhelmingly glad that he cared to talk to her as no other man had ever talked or (she believed) known how to talk. His patience amazed her, his unselfishness bewildered. And with it all he had been the devoted lover, and she had come to know his personal tricks, his physical peculiarities, his mental attitudes, and to love them as a lover will. Their first amazing sense of intimacy had not passed away. Deep down Ann could not conceive of life, now, without Dick. But superimposed had been the growth of a knowledge of him that was not instinctive and not fundamental, and that had resulted in the discovery of the man who had been moulded exteriorly by the years in which she had not known his whereabouts.

Yes, a wonderful six months. And then Spring had come, Spring and adventures afield to Olympia, across the Gulf of Corinth to Delphi, through the mountain passes to Sparta, by sea to Kythera and Cape Matapan and the bay of Navarino. All of them were delightful, even down to the quaint inns, and the necessity for Keating's Powder, and the uncertainty regarding dinner that made one travel with a tin or two of tongue and *pate-de-fois-gras*. But youth would be served. Ann had finally yielded to

Andromache and suggested Athens. Dick, as always, had been willing enough.

They met Lang—Freddie Lang—the first evening, and in five minutes Ann had made the momentous discovery. Tom and Aubrey and the Fifth Division were not in it. And she had made it as follows.

She and Dick had dressed for the first time in six months, and even Dick had rather enjoyed that. It pleasantly brought the world back again, this business of climbing into a stiff shirt and tying a bow. Ann looked delicious in a shimmering sea-green, which she wore with ear-rings and a necklace of moonstones. All mirth and laughter, they descended to try the dinner of the Grande-Bretagne. Even from that ordeal they emerged content, Ann, in her imperious way, surveying the lounge, whence arose the hum of small-talk and the smoke of cigarettes, and selecting a far corner which appeared unoccupied.

"Over there, shall we, Dick?" she said, indicating it with a wave of her cigarette.

"All right, my dear; lead on," he replied, smiling.

He liked to follow her across a crowded lounge. She walked amazingly well and there was something so profoundly British about the way she carried herself. No one would have thought her nervous, nor was she exactly scornful, but it always seemed to him that she suggested, at any rate, as she went that no one else in the room mattered in the least. He fancied that abroad this mannerism was distinctly exaggerated, probably because she had found it necessary, in her unprotected days, to exaggerate it. Anyway, the lounge of the Grande-Bretagne was filled with Americans, French, Germans and Jews, and you could have guessed it from Ann's back without the use of your eyes. There were considerably more men than women, and one and all they watched

her pass. The Americans looked as if they would have liked to lie down before her and be kicked by her sea-green shoes; the French as if with regret they recognised her virtue; the Germans as if they had never seen her like before; the Jews with interest and respect. The American women instantly spoke *sotto voce* to their husbands; the women of other nationalities glanced at once from her to him. Dick wondered, as he followed, if he gave them a reassurance of safety.

So at length they reached the alcove, and found a man in it alone. Ann saw him first and inimitably turned to Dick as if her mind was not yet made up as to where she wished to sit. Dick, more clumsily, surveyed the rest of the room. "There isn't another place," he whispered.

Ann smiled. "This'll do nicely, I think," she said easily, and settled herself into a lounge chair which Dick swung about for her. The other man was opposite, more or less. Dick moved in between them to occupy a position with his back to the wall, and the other man pushed his chair a little out of the way.

"Thanks," said Dick. "That's all right."

"It's getting harder every night to find a place at a reasonable distance from Jews and Dagos," said the other man.

That jarred Dick slightly. Catholicism had begun the fell work, and one of his new-found enthusiasms was for internationalism. So far as they had clashed, he had clashed with Ann over that very thing. Therefore it irritated him—all this below the surface and hardly discernible at all, it must be understood—when she smiled at the stranger's words. The other man—innocently, unobtrusively, but definitely—smiled back.

And then the waiter was there with the coffee. "Liqueur, Ann?" asked Dick.

"Rather, to-night. Crème de Cacao with a half-inch of thick cream on the top, waiter."

"Madame?"

"Better bring Crème de Cacao for two, waiter, and a small jug of thick cream," said Dick.

"Very good, sir."

"Bet you it's tinned Nestlé's, Ann."

"I don't care. Dick, isn't this jolly? You know it is rather fun to be back."

Dick smiled at her. She was such a child, he thought, and so lovely to look upon. "Well," he said, "here we stay till you say the word to go."

"But there's no sign of dancing," objected Ann.

"I confess it's a little heavy."

The liqueurs arrived. Ann tasted the cream with her coffee spoon, dubiously. Then her eyes sparkled.

"*Delicious*, Dick. Now you're to drink it at one go."

She poured the cream upon the two liqueurs till the heavy white fluid, floating on the top of the chocolate-coloured Cacao, filled the glasses. Dick took one. Ann raised hers. "Bottoms up!" she cried.

"Here's to you," said Dick, and they emptied their glasses.

Ann put hers down with a sigh. "Wasn't it *gorgeous*?" she demanded enthusiastically.

Both men laughed a little, involuntarily. The other looked at Dick immediately with a half suggestion of apology, and a half question. Dick, feeling the liqueur glow within him, smiled.

Said the other man: "I say, I haven't seen anyone do that since 1918. It used to be the fashionable liqueur at a little restaurant in Le Havre."

Ann gave a little cry. "Au Guidon!"

"Good heavens!" said the other man, "you don't say you know it?"

"Know it? Why, I used to go there regularly when I was in Le Havre."

"Up that back passage?"

"Of course. *And* through the kitchen to the stairs."

"With Marie at the top?"

Ann turned to Dick. "Dick, beloved, call the waiter and order three more!"

The rite once more accomplished, the other man began again. "Do you know," he said, "I may as well say it right out, when you two came out of the dining-room, I was hoping and praying you'd come here."

"Why?" laughed Dick.

"Because I was having a whisky-soda when you registered. I've been back here from Macedonia a fortnight and I suppose I've watched scores of people register. You're the first English there've been. At least there were a couple of old ladies and a professor attached to the British School, but they don't count. I haven't met a person I could talk to since I was stranded in Athens."

"I'm not surprised," said Ann, glancing round. "But what in the world is there to do here?"

"Well, I couldn't help hearing you mention dancing. There are one or two good places."

"Oh, are there? You don't say so. Where?"

"There's a place called the Zappeion, and . . ."

That was how it began. A quarter of an hour later, Dick went upstairs for Ann's wrap and found them deep in the War when he returned. "We've introduced ourselves, by the way, Dick," said Ann. "Mr. Lang."

"I really am awfully glad you've turned up, Mr Thurstan," said Lang.

So was Dick, genuinely, half an hour later. He could hardly have failed to be. Ann's face expressed such happiness and she danced so well. So did her partner.

As for Dick, he did not dance—had not since his University days, and in the Mission had seen as much of jazz and modern dancing as Freddie Lang had seen of Catholic Missions. He had tried to dance with Ann once in Paris, but it had not been successful, and though she had since asked him occasionally to try, the subject had been mutually dropped after an evening in Malta during which Dick had lost his temper and Ann a good pair of shoes. Now, however, it was self-evident that she was enjoying herself immensely. They both seemed indefatigable. Lang was eloquent in her praise. And whenever she caught Dick's eye as she passed, she smiled at him or waved her hand.

But Dick was very glad to leave. The garish place had bored him. He had smoked too much and drunk too much. He had a bit of a headache. He was rather silent as they taxied back to their hotel and glad of Ann's hand on his arm. They left Lang to have a night-cap in the lounge and went up together.

"Old thing, you've been a bit bored," said Ann, lovingly, as he shut the door.

"Never mind me," retorted Dick.

He was sorry the next moment. Ann winced at a word like that so easily. "I'm sorry, darling," he said, crossing to her. "I do want you to enjoy yourself. Honestly, I do. Kiss."

And they kissed. But next morning Ann had coffee in bed because she was tired, and Dick had breakfast alone in the almost-empty dining-room. The whole hotel seemed dishevelled and bored. Dick went out as quickly as he could into the sun and forgot his loneliness in Beck and Borth's bookshop.

II

It all came about so naturally. The next evening Dick suggested that they go to the Acropolis by moonlight, and Ann agreed. But nothing fell out as it should have done. Lang joined them after coffee and asked if Ann were dancing again that night. Thus at once dancing and the visit to the Acropolis became rival entertainments, the one backed by Dick and the other by Lang. Ann continued true to her promise, but Lang somehow came, too. Therefore it seemed Dick's fault when his entertainment didn't come up to scratch, when Ann tired climbing the hill, when they stumbled perilously among loose stones, when clouds hid the moon and a mist the major part of the city. Lang made the best of things and indeed induced Ann to laugh at the follies of tourists and the foolishness of attempting to do the sort of thing the guide-book said ought to be done.

When they got back to the Place de la Constitution there was a light rain falling. In the hotel lounge Ann cheered up a little over a bottle of champagne and champagne cocktails. Lang constructed them, and figured also as a good *raconteur*. Nor could Dick play his part, for Lang's stories were out of his range of experience—stories of adventure in various parts of the world with a kind of *Blackwood's* ring to them all. They were good stories, though, and Dick enjoyed them very nearly as much as Ann did.

Incidentally Lang offered his credentials. It appeared that he was the business end of a British engineering contract in the newly-acquired Macedonian possessions of Greece, returned to Athens to keep open the lines of communication, as it were. And it appeared, also, that he excessively regretted his job. He gave amusing accounts of his interviews with Greek Government

officials and described with some shrewdness the political muddle of the State. He thought they might see a mild revolution any day. Ann was thrilled, especially when Lang assured her that whichever side came up on top, the British at least would be safe enough. There would be as many Union Jacks in the streets, he said, as Republican flags, when the moment arrived. Meanwhile he had a great deal of time on his hands.

They discussed him in their bedroom. "He's really not at all a bad sort," said Ann.

"Almost a gentleman," said Dick.

Ann continued to brush her hair for a while. Then : "I wish you'd seen a little of the War, dear," she said.

"I'm sorry I didn't," he replied, "but why especially?"

"It was the men who were 'almost gentlemen' who saved England," said Ann.

"'Is Saul also among the prophets'?"

Ann leant towards her mirror in her nightly search for what Dick had called "footprints on the sands of time."

"I hadn't your Biblical education," she remarked.

Dick was suddenly aware how near they were to a quarrel, but an obstinate core in him asserted itself notwithstanding. He declined to explain. He said, instead: "I wasn't at the War, but Lang rather reminds me of a type I have often heard described: the men at the Base who were always regretting that duty prevented their being at the Front."

Ann got into bed silently. She lay upon her back on her own side, and not, as their custom was, with his right arm round her and her head on his breast for awhile. They both stared into the dusk. Then, impulsively, Ann reached a hand out towards him. "Dick, darling," she said, "don't let's speak to him again."

Dick hardened his heart. "For God's sake, Ann," he

said testily, "don't be a fool. We can't drop the fellow like a hot brick."

Ann withdrew her hand. Then, shortly, she turned over away from him. A few minutes later he heard a muffled sound.

Contrition welled up in him. "Ann, my love, my darling," he cried, reaching out to her passionately. "Oh, Ann, I'm a beast; I never meant it. Ann, sweetness!"

She nestled into his arms. "I don't—know—why—I'm so silly," she said through her tears. "I—never—used to cry. I think it's—be—because—I've—nobody but you."

"My little love," he whispered, covering her face and eyes with kisses, "my sweetness, my darling. Don't cry, Ann. I can't bear it. I don't know what was the matter with me, either."

They breakfasted downstairs together and in the lounge met Lang. Dick had been trying to get a tourist agency on the inadequate telephone for a car to take them to Cape Sunion. "Try Ghiolman's," said Lang. "They're almost as near, and 'll find you just as good a car for half the money. Here, leave it to me. I know the old man. I can arrange it like a shot."

"It's awfully good of you," began Dick.

"Not a scrap. It's a damned bad road, though." He glanced at Ann.

"Can't be worse than some we've been over," she laughed. "Kalamata to Navarino, for example."

He agreed. "I'll just run round," he said. "It's not five minutes."

Dick went with him. An hour later he confessed to Ann. "I was wrong," he said. "It really was jolly good of Lang. This Ghiolman fellow seems quite a decent sort."

In the evening, Lang volunteered to get Dick permission to take photographs in the Archæological Museum. He knew the officials at the office of the General Ephoros. And it was Dick who suggested dancing.

Five days later, Dick was taking photographs in the Archæological Museum, going early to get the morning light. Ann was breakfasting in bed, and descending late for an aperitif with Lang before lunch at the Café Zacharatos. Dick, hot and enthusiastic, used to pick them up there. They had formed the habit of lunching together.

They went together to Eleusis. Dick spent a couple of hours among the ruins. He persuaded Ann to visit the grotto from which Persephone emerged from Hades, but she was not particularly interested in what could be called a grotto with difficulty. It was very hot. Afterwards she and Lang sat on the Rock Terrace and enjoyed the Bay of Salamis. He told her his idea of its story: how he and some others had chartered a boat to visit the island, how the skipper had turned out a mild sort of brigand, and how he had had to be knocked on the head and sat upon while one of Lang's friends, previously a lieutenant in the Navy, took charge. Later they went on to Daphni and Lang conjured coffee out of a tiny xenodochia while Dick attempted to talk with a priest about the frescoes. That evening they dined together at a Gfeek restaurant in the Greek style, Lang arranging the menu. It was plain he knew his way about Athens. They were very jolly together, and Dick noticed with amusement that it was now "Ann" and "Fred."

He was perhaps a fool, but he had none of Mildred's wisdom, and Ann was enjoying herself immensely. Besides, he began to see that he had wronged Lang in the beginning from a certain ignorance of the world, or perhaps from a prejudice against a certain aspect of it. He

had nothing whatever in common with the engineer, and that was really all there was to it. For the rest, he was a very decent fellow, who knew his way about and helped Ann to a thoroughly good time. He was a genial companion, married, with a couple of kiddies whose photographs he showed them. He took life as it came, with a certain shrewd intelligence which Dick lacked. Occasionally he did "a job of work," once or twice with Dick present, and Dick admired the way he handled officials, and recognised that with the best will in the world he would still have had a lot of time on his hands. Both he and Ann spoke openly of their plans and did their best to draw Dick into their amusements, but after a while a kind of tentative arrangement came into being. Dick was to be left free to enjoy his antiquities and Ann was to have a holiday and a bout of dancing. In a few weeks, if Fred could get leave from his Company, they planned a voyage through the Cyclades to the Sporades, returning *via* Crete. Fred knew the ropes. Dick was as eager as Ann in anticipating that.

But once or twice Dick felt increasingly lonely. Thus, once, he had been to Thebes, and, disappointed, had returned early. Ann was out. He made his way to the hotel where she and Fred usually went to the *thé-dansant*, but they were not there. He wandered about moodily. He was bored to tears in the hotel lounge. Ann and her escort returned so late that he was already dressed for dinner, returned so full of enthusiasm for a new discovery (in the *thé-dansant* line) that Dick was disarmed. They were returning in the evening. They pressed him to accompany them. He almost consented, but finally begged off. The excursion to Thebes had been unusually tiring. He went alone and early to bed, and only woke when Ann got in beside him at one in the morning. She was very loving, and glad, she said, to

find him waiting for her. In her arms, he forgot that he had been disappointed earlier on in the day.

Within a fortnight that was the established order of their going. Dick even had a chat with Lang, while they were waiting for Ann to come down to dinner, in which he opened up considerably. It appeared that Lang knew that he and Ann were not married. He was to be one of those friends whom the knowledge did not offend. Dick warmed to him, and exulted that he and Ann trusted each other so completely and were so entirely free.

III

They were leaving for Crete in a couple of days and Dick had not been to Platæa or to Phyle. The admirable Ghiolman assured him that in a car with a clear day he could do both, and Ann, since he had only two more days, told him he might be a good boy and go, even although he would not be back for dinner. There was a special night on at the Aqueduct, and he could find her there when he returned. Or, if he was too tired, Fred would see her safely home. She kissed him when he was dressed, and asked him to have breakfast sent up in a couple of hours. He was to get good photographs: there would be just time to have them developed before they sailed. Dick went off very happily.

He had a good day, and if he missed Ann, he had to admit that she would have been unconscionably tired as he climbed into bed. A cheerful note on his dressing-table told him she would be back late. He was almost instantly asleep.

Hours later he became dreamily conscious of a light in the room, while still not sufficiently awake to make any attempt to explain or understand it. He was next aware that the light increased in volume outside his shut

eyes, and he kept them shut simply because he knew instinctively he would be dazzled unpleasantly if he opened them. Then, suddenly, there was darkness. The sudden transition really awakened him. He remembered that Ann had not returned when he got into bed. He considered, still sleepily but contentedly, that in another moment she would be getting into bed beside him. And then a sharp "click," occurring without warning, finally and consciously aroused him. He opened his eyes.

He was alone in the dark. His mind began to work rapidly. Ann must have come in, turned on the light, switched it off again and gone out with caution. No; with the utmost caution, for he understood that "click" now. The door had been slowly and gently closed, but the latch had shot unexpectedly. If he had been asleep he would never have heard it. And Ann must have thought him asleep. He sat up in bed.

The uncurtained windows admitted faint starlight. He looked about him. On a chair by the bed, by his side of the bed, stood an electric hand-lamp. He remembered that it had been on the mantelpiece when he got into bed. His rapidly quickening intelligence told him in a moment that the light of that lamp had been advanced close to his face to see if he slept. And then, on another chair, he saw Ann's clothes. He glanced at the pillow by his side. What had happened was instantly plain. She had gone out in her nightdress and kimono.

Dick smiled to himself in the dark and lay down again. She had gone out for the simplest of reasons and would be back in a minute or two. But even as he smiled, he realised that he had been suspicious, and of whom and why he had been suspicious. Thoughts which he had deliberately trodden down, to which he had refused, almost, conscious birth, had awakened in him. He saw to what the events of the last fortnight had been leading.

With any other woman than Ann, he might well have been alarmed by that minute inspection of himself and by that stealthy closing of the door. And then he knew he *was* alarmed; that he would be infinitely relieved when the door reopened.

But it did not reopen. A slight sweat of apprehension broke out on him. He would not so much as tolerate the conception of where Ann might be and of what Ann might be doing—if she were not Ann—at that moment. He had no watch handy, but he would count. Say another minute. He counted sixty.

Half-way to one hundred and twenty he leapt from his bed. She might be ill. Fool that he was not to think of it! He switched on the light and blinked in the glare. Of course that was it. He slipped into his dressing-gown as he went, not waiting for slippers, and opened the bedroom door.

The corridor stretched empty away. Half-way down on the left was the lavatory door—and a pace or two beyond the door of Lang's room. He hated himself for thinking of the latter and advanced rapidly but on still bare feet. Reaching the lavatory, he hesitated a second; then he tried the door. It opened freely. The place was empty.

Dick had known no moment before in all his life like that. It was literally true that he was shaken to the centre of his being. He hardly remembered where he was or what he did; indeed, stupidly, he had but one conscious thought in his mind—that Ann had come through the woods of Kent wearing a necklace of painted wooden beads. The mental concept of those simple, pretty, uncommon wooden beads formed in his mind in such a way that the tears started to his eyes. Thus, then, he stumbled forward, clumsily and with no caution, and tried Lang's door.

It was locked. It might well have been, but in that moment Dick knew the real reason beyond a doubt. With almost another sense, he knew, too, that behind that door the dark room grew rigidly still with apprehension. He knew that he had heard sounds which had ceased. He knew more: he knew that for two others the world was falling in completest devastation. And knowing that, he called "Ann" once, in a voice that he did not know for his own, turned blindly, and walked back automatically to his own room.

He entered, but before he closed the door, realised what had happened and stood there erect with his hand on the door-handle. Understanding returned clearly to him. It was as if blow upon blow now fell upon his soul; or as if picture after picture flashed on a screen before him; or as if waves of thought, each definite and conclusive and beyond argument, flooded over him the while he slowly drowned.

First, the room itself emphasised the poignancy of his loss. On the dressing-table lay Ann's trinkets—the very wooden necklace of his recent remembrance, the rings he had given her, her toilet articles in tortoise-shell and silver. (She would not have gold, she had said, because she had thought silver went better with the tortoise-shell.) On the chair lay the silk stockings where she had tossed them in haste, and beneath them the shoes of the evening. On a trunk-stand stood a suit-case she had already packed against their excursion. The door of the wardrobe was half open and he could see her frocks.

Then he hated Lang. He was conscious that he must kill him. He did not stop to consider the when or the where or the how, though he dimly realised that he had no weapon. His mind was just, suddenly, all hate. He had not known he could hate so. The smiling, laughing, contemptible cur! He watched that wave

break and flood his soul to its innermost recesses—and retreat.

Then he pitied Ann. He saw her standing guiltily in her lover's room, he by her side, trying to grapple with this thing that had come about. She would see the folly of such a thing as this. She would see that she had to face him, or send her lover to face him, sooner or later, before the morning. She would have to figure in Lang's divorce-suit, the Ann who had gone down so bravely into the depths once and who had come out so shaken with her agony. She might even see, as he saw pitilessly in a hard harsh light, that as she had forsaken him, so she would one day forsake Lang, and come to an end at last in a veritable hell. His Ann!

And at that the last wave broke. He saw, as suddenly as he had seen and felt one by one these other emotions, the real tragedy of the situation. That he was desolate mattered little; of what use was hate? that Ann stood in need of pity was possibly his own imagination; the hideous fact of facts was his own failure. The drama of existence had pushed Ann in his path. He had seen, in the comforting and protection of her, a mission for his own empty life. He had seen more: he had seen in Ann a message from the Beyond, a creative stimulus by which he might find himself, an external being to himself through which even God might be manifested in him. Faintly he had adumbrated these things, and set them out before him. And *he* had failed. Not she. "If I cannot hold you—" he had said, confidently. And he had not been able to hold her. Latterly—the sting of it!—he had scarcely tried.

All this while he had stood motionless by the door, and for how long he could not say. But now a kind of clarity returned to him. He moved forward and sat down on the bed. He rehearsed events. She knew that he knew.

They would surely open Lang's door at last to see what was without. They would see the plain evidence of his own discovery: the open lavatory door which he had forgot to close, his lighted room, its own door just ajar. He would not shut it. Then, sooner or later, they would make some movement. Meanwhile, what was he to do?

He thought, first, that he would dress rapidly, pack a suit-case and leave at once. There was no real reason why he should not. The first train out of the station, to anywhere. And then? He, *who had failed Ann*.

No; he would see it out. Dress and go downstairs till the morning; better, dress and walk through the night. He could formulate some plan as he went. There would have to be a plan. Good God, formulate a plan while one thought beat insistently, torturingly upon him, that *he had failed Ann!* Had failed the gay, loveable, loving Ann. *His Ann*.

Lang. It was curious: he no longer hated Lang. After all, all men were bound to fall in love with Ann. Besides, what right had he, Dick, to Ann? Incuriously, pitilessly, he knew he could not play the outraged husband or even the robbed lover. He was too—"modern," he supposed bitterly. Ann was free by their own agreement and he had failed to hold her—that was the crux of it. That struck any weapon with which he might threaten Lang instantly from his hand.

And then somewhere in his consciousness, somehow, something broke in him. Grief had gone, curiously enough. He no longer wondered what he had better do. He no longer considered dressing, or a return to Lang's room, or an exit from the hotel. He got up and paced the room. He paused now and then to finger for a moment or two trifles that had been hers—"had been," for somehow her very possession of things that he knew, with herself, seemed past. He thought dully of

the Bishop, of Philip, of Aubrey, of their life in Greece. The world of appearances passed in array before him, person by person, thing by thing, place by place. And from somewhere outside of Becoming, Dick Thurstan saw what he had lost.

IV

The door opened and Ann came in. She closed it behind her and stood there in the white light, erect, white-faced, her eyes on his face. "What are you going to do, Dick?" she asked, tonelessly.

He stopped in his walk, regarding her. He had no longer any emotion to speak of. In a voice like her own he replied. "I don't know, Ann. What would you wish done?"

"Surely," she said, "that is for you to say."

"Is it? I don't know. I'm not used to this."

A trace of bitterness crept into her voice. "Nor am I, if you can believe me."

He smiled a little, without meaning. "I beg your pardon," he said. "I didn't mean to imply that you were." And it was a foolish thing to say, anyhow. Only—to tell you the truth—I don't quite know what I am saying or doing."

"You had no suspicion this might happen?"

"None whatever. I trusted you, you see."

"Ok, yes. And you gave me my freedom from the start. You didn't think what might happen if you gave me my freedom?"

Dick was honestly puzzled. "I don't quite understand," he said.

She moved forward and sat on the bed. "It didn't strike you that some women—perhaps all women—don't want freedom? Some of us aren't ready for freedom. Your freedom has brought me to this."

"But—but—what else could I have done? You agreed. You *are* free. You *have to be* free. Nothing can tie up or sell or enslave a soul. Can't you see that, even now, Ann? If you couldn't freely stay by me, what use would it have been to chain you? If we had married, would it be any better now, Ann?"

She stared at him. "How little you understand women," she said bitterly.

"Do I? I thought I knew something about them. One doesn't study Moral Theology for nothing."

"Good God," she cried, "Moral Theology! Sometimes you're not human, Dick." Then, almost irrelevantly, "If we'd been married, if he'd known we were married, this wouldn't have happened."

"But *he* is married," objected Dick, hopelessly. "Has it restrained him? And you yourself didn't want us to marry."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Then what are you going to do now?" she insisted.

He flung out his hands wildly. "I don't know! What *am* I to do?" Then he saw light. "I'll do whatever you wish," he said.

"Whatever I wish?" she asked, slowly.

"Yes. Oh, Ann, it's the least that I can do. Ann, I can't put it properly into words, and I know I'm standing here calm enough apparently, but I'm just dumb, frozen, utterly dead. My poor Ann, how I have failed you! I see it all now. I told you, I warned you, that perhaps I couldn't hold you. And I've failed. I've failed *you*. I've *failed* you. Oh, Ann, can you forgive me? There is no bitterness in the world like this."

He hardly knew what he did, or that it was against the tend of his own words. Nor had he thought that thus he would have received her, thus he would have been speaking. But somehow he was across the room, and

somehow he was kneeling at her feet and hiding his face against her knees. Ah, how dear was the touch of her, and the familiar faint fragrance of her soft linen! He was conscious of little else. Somehow touch and scent released emotion. "Forgive me, Ann," he managed again to say.

Inexplicably she bent over him. Her hands were about his shoulders, her hair on his neck. A rain of hot tears fell on him kneeling there. Scarcely believing, he heard her through her sobs. "Oh, Dick, Dick, don't send me away, don't let me go! Dick, Dick, get up, Dick. I ought to be kneeling there. Oh, beloved, save me, save me, Dick, save me from myself! Don't let me go. Say you won't let me go, that you won't send me away! Dick, Dick!"

Sobs shook her so profoundly that he was momentarily terrified for her. He got up and put his arms about her, marvelling. She clung to him, imploring, her eyes, wide now with fear and sorrow, like a child's searching his face. He could not bear them. He hid her face in his shoulder. She sobbed there.

"You haven't failed me. You mustn't say it—I won't have you say it. You've been marvellous, wonderful—I wouldn't have believed it—it—possible. Dick, I shall die if you leave me. I've nowhere to go;—I mean my soul—what you call my soul—has nowhere to go. I've been mad, mad, these last few days. I thought you didn't—didn't—*want* me. I—"

Passionately he caught her to him. "Not *want* you, sweetness? Why, you're the light of my eyes, my hope of heaven! But I don't understand. Ann, darling, don't cry like that. Stop, my little one, stop. You must stop. Listen to me, Ann darling."

Her sobs died down. He took his arms from her, and stood up. The reality came back to him. He was once

more bewildered. "Then you don't love Lang?" he demanded.

She shook her head, vehemently.

"You don't want to go away with him?"

"No, no, oh no."

"But then, then—— You were in his room?"

"I—I—only—love—you."

"What were you doing there then? He kissed you?"

She nodded.

"He made love to you?"

"In—in a way," she sobbed.

"Ann, honestly—Ann, you wouldn't lie to me—did you give yourself to him?"

She looked up, her eyes big with tears. "No, Dick. I swear I didn't."

"Why?"

"I can't lie," she said. "You came in time."

For a few minutes Dick stood there, staring at her, and then turned again and walked the room. He was, poor soul, monstrously bewildered. But beneath his bewilderment there was dawning another emotion, overmasteringly great. It attached itself to a small thing, if anything is small. He had come in time! He had not wholly failed her. Maybe his awakening was in some degree akin to their first meeting—a plan, or part of a scheme. But even in that moment, he put the thought resolutely from him. *That* was not the thing to hold on to. That was unexplained, possibly inexplicable, or explicable on a score of theories any one of which might be true and reduce it—if it was reduction—to the perfectly normal. The point to grip was that they had met. Soul had spoken soul. Hand had gripped hand. And even in this hour Ann owned it and wanted to stand by it.

He stopped. She was sitting on the bed, crying more quietly now. "Ann."

"Yes."

"My darling, can you tell me why you went to him?"

She shook her head.

That did not satisfy him. "Look here," he said, "we've got to face this thing. Frankly, I'm floored. I don't know what I expected you to say or do when you returned, but at least I thought I was down and out. You had, it seemed to me, plainly chosen him and rejected me. And—after a bit—I knew what I've confessed to you, knew it as I pray God I shall never forget it. I *had* failed you. This last fortnight, I've been thinking of myself. I thought you were happy, but I ought to have known, to have seen. You shared in me at Nauplia, I ought to have shared in you at Athens. Darling, I'm frightfully sorry."

"It—it— isn't that."

Dick was amazed. "Not that!" he exclaimed.

She raised her head and spoke vehemently. "No. Oh, Dick, no. I love you to be clever, and interested in history and philosophy and—and things." (He smiled even then.) "I don't want you like other men—dancing and fooling around and talking rubbish. I'm proud of you, terribly proud, and awfully proud you want me with you. But—but—" (she faltered) "I'm not—not strong."

He crossed over and sat beside her again. "But how, my darling?" he asked.

"It's so hard to say."

"To me?"

She nodded.

"You mean you're not strong enough to be told you're free?" For a second bitterness gripped him. "God, when we told each other that—for you told me too—I could have sworn that it would be you and not I who would have had cause for pain!"

"Dick! Oh, Dick, can you ever forgive me?"

He took her hand. "Listen, Ann," he said. "You know what I think about you. You know that you've brought back to me a true religion, a kind of spiritual sense I had lost. You've given me a centre, for one thing. For another I can't explain what—what—" (it was hard still to say it, but he managed)—"what we feel for each other except in terms of soul and spirit. And now you can believe me still further. I trust you that you're telling the truth when you say I was in time. I don't know that it would matter—" He broke off. "I won't say that. I was in time, anyway. You hadn't physically turned from me. And you love me more than you love him. And——"

"I don't love him at all."

"Well, you love me and not him. And you don't want to go from me. And we're going to make a bigger effort than ever to pull together. But I must know one other thing, if it's possible. If I can I must understand. Why, Ann dear, did you go to him at all?"

Ann's eyes sought his face. Then they dropped. "Don't look at me," she said.

He got up and moved away, standing by the empty fireplace and watching her bowed shoulders. "All right, dear," he said.

"Dick, it's hard on a woman to have to say it, I think. I don't know why, though. . . . Dick, I do see what you mean about being free. And I love it too. I don't mean what I said just now: it was only that one had to say something. I want you to—to trust me, if you can again—ever again. But—but—you must tie me tight, tight, to you, Dick, by—by—— Oh, I can't say things as you do! Ties. Trust's one, respect's another, helping each other's another, loving each other's another, and—and, all the rest. But there's one I want, Dick.

It's in my blood. It's still there, Dick, even if you think it isn't. And it's that—that—that Fred—offered me to-night."

Dick said nothing.

Suddenly she jumped to her feet. "Didn't you think what a *fool* I was?" she cried. "Who but a crazy maddened fool would have gone to him then? If I hadn't undressed first, so that you wouldn't have known if you had wakened— As it was, half-waking you with the light too. Can't you see, Dick, can't you see?"

"You mean," he began slowly.

"Ah, you don't see! I was mad. Dick, there is that in me that wants *passion*, mad passion sometimes. It's like a beast asleep in me. It's been waking and straining at the leash and— All these days. While you've been—been 'interested.'"

Dick crossed the room in great strides and caught her into his arms. "It's not a beast," he cried. "I won't have you say that. Do you hear, I won't have you say that." He rained kisses upon her, bending her head back and covering her lips, her face, her throat. "It's the Divine in you, child, life itself, that's what it is. It's I who have been half-dead, wholly blind. While we're in the flesh, God Himself is flesh, beloved, and flesh itself is part of God. I've forgotten that. And—and—I've always been—how shall I say?—'delicate,' 'thoughtful'——" There was bitter self-scorn in his tone.

"Dick, don't; I can't bear that; you've always been a dear."

"Maybe, as if all the woman who has found her man wants is a dear! As if all a man who is finding Life through a woman wants is her soul! Ann, we start a new life to-night!"

She caught her breath and looked up at him with wondering eyes. "Dick!"

"Get into bed," he cried, masterfully. "We've had enough of talk. Child, you're cold as ice. My God, Ann, after to-night you'll be no longer free! Leave me, and I'll stride through heaven and hell after you. . . . Let me get my arms about you, beloved. Ann, you're mine, mine. Every bit of you. Every inch of you. See? See?"

Physically and emotionally Ann was worn-out, but that mattered nothing. When Dick drew the thin covering of her nightdress from her and pressed her exultantly to his own body, she gladly gave herself. She was utterly shamed that he should want her so that night, and utterly triumphant. Even when he said, as she rested, spent, in his arms: "God, and it's taken a Freddie Lang to teach me this!" she forgave him. Dear, clever Dick, but he was hers now, and a child at last, truly, for all his strength. And they both slept.

V

She awoke with Dick disengaging his arms from about her in an early dawn, she awoke to instant remembrance. Her first thought was one Dick himself would never have expected—fear. For a new Dick had come to birth last night, and it wasn't at all certain what he might do.

He got out of bed. "Dick, where are you going?" she asked timidly.

"To interview Lang," he said grimly, reaching for his dressing-gown.

"Oh, Dick, what are you going to do?"

"Tell him what I think of him," said Dick. He found his slippers in silence.

At last: "You know he was a bit—— Well——" she said.

"You mean he'd had too much to drink?"

Ann flushed. "That shames me so, Dick," she whispered.

He stopped on his way to the door and came back to her, kneeling by her side. "Listen, Ann," he said. "I daresay I ought to go in with a revolver or a horse-whip or something, but I'm not going to do that. I understand what I didn't understand last night, for all that I've been a priest—that passion, like everything else, can lead to God. Consequently I can see just how strong it is and how easily it can lead to what we call the devil. I can give Lang the benefit of a doubt. Maybe he forgot his wife and kiddies. Maybe he never had from his wife what you, you wonder of grace, have given me. Anyway, I don't wonder he fell in love with you. See?" And he kissed her on the lips. Then he rose, and was gone.

(Ann cried a little while he was away because she saw he had grown very wise in a night and left so much unsaid.)

Dick found Lang's door unlocked. He entered without ceremony. The other man was awake, sitting up in bed. He looked peculiarly unhappy.

"I say," he began at once, "you must think me an awful blackguard."

Dick stood at the end of the bed and surveyed him curiously. He was even a little amused that he should be there. "I don't know," he said at last.

Lang looked amazed. Then he half laughed. "I thought you'd come with a horsewhip," he said, "and I've been wondering if I'd fight."

"There was no need," said Dick, grimly.

"What do you mean?"

"You're licked already. I'm the better man, though I don't dance. She's chosen me."

Lang flushed. Then: "I'm damned glad," he said.

"You'd better be," said Dick, "and stay so."

CHAPTER XI

The Aerodrome

I

"WHY 'Harker's'?" asked Mildred lazily.

"Nobody knows," replied Aubrey, smiling, "wherein lies, my dear Mildred, a secret and mystical philosophy. Day by day I praise Harker with awe and gratitude; I use his name in great transactions and little; but I am baffled whenever I attempt to arrive at his origins or purposes. Mythically, the peasantry still affirm an historic Harker, but in all probability the stories associated with him are no more than legends and his very name may be a corruption. Thus of the original Harker we know nothing, but we rejoice in his works. Probably he planted the earliest primal Orchard. On the other hand, he may well have had no historical existence at all. You observe, indeed, that in all this property—flower garden, lawn, kitchen garden and tennis-court—there is actually no orchard at all. For a man may be great on the earth and influence it mightily who has never lived. In fact it is almost a truism that only by becoming a mere legend is it possible for a man to be a great power." And Aubrey stopped, triumphantly.

"Aubrey," said Mildred, "are you aware that the volume of the nonsense you talk increases daily?"

"I dare say," retorted the little man happily. "I am returning to faith, Mildred, having been delivered from æstheticism and dilettantism. I am finding it daily more easy to have faith in Father Christmas, Moses and Harker. It's a delightful experience. And I owe it to you—and Dick."

"What in the world do you mean?"

"Just what I say. I thought there was something

significant about Dick's refusal and your acceptance of formal religion because neither of you could believe in it. And I've come to see that you were both wrong in your definition of faith. You both made it 'intellectually believing to be true.' Of course it's not that. Faith's an attitude of the soul. A man should be able to withdraw it or exercise it at his pleasure. Only the wise man has faith in practically everything, for practically everything, regarded in faith, can help him to become more wise."

Mildred drank her last cup of tea and sat up. "Now, Aubrey," she said, "I'll give you five minutes to talk sense. Then you must go and get out the car, or we shall be late. For sometimes I think there is method in your madness, and when I do I am interested in you."

Aubrey flushed. He was quite fond of Mildred by now, and knew she was of him, but he always blushed when he thought he saw signs of it. Also his excitement had betrayed him into more definite expression than was usual with him in the presence of Mildred. They expected Dick and Ann that afternoon, and she had come over to go with him to meet them. He had become progressively excited ever since they had neared Paris; now he was exuberant.

"Hurry up," said Mildred.

Aubrey looked wildly around. They were sitting under an old oak on the edge of the flower garden that had probably been in existence before anything else now alive on the property. From its shade one saw across the late autumn beds and cool lawn to the house. The French windows of his study were open. He had an inspiration.

"You see my study?" he said. "Let us suppose an individual whom I had never seen before were to step out of it and begin to approach us. Now before he had

descended the slope (and awakened Felix) I could decide in my soul whether or not I would put faith in him. If I were—er—profoundly wise, deeply wise, wise in intuition and self-knowledge, I mean, I should undoubtedly decide to believe in him.”

“And be a fool. He asks you for half-a-sovereign to get to London for a job, and you give it him. He then gets drunk to-night in the ‘Pickworth Arms,’ and to-morrow tells a dozen others that you’re a soft ‘un.”

“Possibly, but what would that matter to me? I should have given him my half-sovereign. Charity blesses the giver, not the recipient. ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ‘Give to him that asketh of you, despairing of no man.’ My faith would have gained for me what your intellectual acumen would have lost: half-a-sovereign’s worth of grace.”

“Aubrey, I once told you you were dangerous. I was joking then, but I’m beginning to believe it. Where did you learn this folly?”

“I’ve told you already, from you and Dick.”

“Well, I can see in a way that you may have taken warning from me. Worldly-wise, Aubrey, you’d be a disappointment. But what has Dick to do with it? He’s responsible for enough as it is, poor man.”

Aubrey’s face changed from a half-jocular, half-triumphant smile to a serious expression. “That,” he said, “would take more than five minutes.”

“I daresay we’ve time.” You can drive faster. I love you to drive fast, for I always hope you’ll be arrested. In the grasp of the Law, Aubrey, you would be a delight.”

But Aubrey was too serious to smile. He looked away from her to the blue distance and the far Downs. “I’m not so absolutely sure of Dick, of course,” he said. “That’s why I want him back so much. I shall soon know then.”

"But what do you expect to find?"

The little man thought awhile. Then: "You didn't know Dick," he said. "I did, rather well. From the start, Dick and I had no education, in the true sense of education. It wasn't our fault, perhaps, but it was so. Nobody attempted to draw anything much out of either of us: they just stuffed things in. Dick was stuffed beautifully full, as every Catholic priest must be. He was stuffed with a big philosophy based on reason: I acquired parts of it by reasoning myself. As for Dick, he was all reason, from Plato to Thomas Aquinas. And he got the idea, as indeed I don't see how he could have avoided getting it, that you could be and had to be logical about God and Life and Faith. He was taught that Faith was the gift of God, but even that was a logical deduction on the part of his teachers. Ultimately his reason led him whither it's bound to lead in the end—to sheer Agnosticism."

"Well, one has to be reasonable," objected Mildred.

Aubrey ignored her. "Ann's intervention," he went on, "opened a new path to him. He saw that there might be things beyond reason, and he saw one thing, expressly in this particular case, by a new faculty, by sheer 'recognition.' His love of Ann. That was what flabbergasted me, and you too. Only in your—er—flabbergastion (if there is such a word) I got a clue. Then Dick gave me another. When he wrote about Beauty. He was getting down into the depths of his soul and recognising beauty much as he had recognised Ann. And now he isn't having things stuffed into him at all any more—or I think not. He's—haven't you seen it reflected in Ann's letters? I have, when you've read me bits of them—he's more concerned with *being* than *understanding*. And what else he's recognised now, down there, I don't know."

"God?" queried Mildred, and she had never spoken the word in the same tone before. But Aubrey did not notice that.

"How can I say?" he asked. "All the gods, perhaps."

He went beyond her there. She was even a little irritated. It might have been that Mildred Sinclair, for once in her life, caught an authentic glimpse through the bars of Heaven. Or it might have been that she realised—recognised—that she was too blind to see. In either case it was well.

"What rubbish!" she said, in her usual tone. "Utter rubbish!"

That jerked Aubrey back to earth. "Eh? Why? There's no god in whom it is not well to have faith, Mildred. They're mostly indigent and they nearly all ask for half-a-sovereign at least. Look what the divine Harker demands of me! For the cost of the ideal that I form of his Orchard, consult Hedge, who thinks seedsmen 'somethink shockin'!'"

Mildred got up lazily. "It'll have to be thirty all the way," she said. "Well, you deserve to be run in."

Aubrey jumped to his feet, flushed and excited again. Mildred thought, dispassionately, that she had never seen him quite like this before.

"And there are such odd gods in the pantheon, Mildred. Some of them Luther and Calvin miscalled devils. Though they do say, if you carry 'recognition' far enough, that all of them have their uses!"

Mildred was honestly astonished. Aubrey of all people! "Now what in the world do you mean by *that*?" she demanded.

But he had gone, running towards the garage, and, appropriately, the black and white Felix, sure it was a game of some sort, was running after him, tail in air.

Five minutes later the car was at the door and Mildred got in. Aubrey was just about to start when he remembered something. "Mrs. Mickle," he called, "the flowers in my study. I forgot to put them in Mrs. Thurstan's room."

She appeared at the kitchen door, smiling. "I'll see to it, sir," she said.

II

Aubrey made the Croydon Aerodrome in excellent time for all Mildred's forebodings, nor, so far as he knew, had his number been taken *en route*. They parked the car and entered the enclosure, making their way to the arrival hangar. There was already some autumnal evening haze over the ground, which definitely added to the sense of spaciousness there is about the place. Uncompleted as an air-station though it undoubtedly was in comparison with the aerodrome of the future, one had a feeling here, nevertheless, that never has and never will belong to a railway-station.

"It'd scare me," said Aubrey frankly, "but I don't wonder at their travelling by air."

"Why, particularly?" asked Mildred, drawing her furs about her, for it was distinctly chilly. "Anyway, I'd prefer meeting them by rail. It's warmer."

"I expect there's a waiting-room somewhere. Shall I go and see?"

"No. I don't want to miss any of it. What are all those buildings for?"

"I don't know in detail; that's the beauty of it. Can you feel how wonderful it is here, Mildred? Look at this great, open, silent place—it's nearly a thousand yards long. That's the control tower from which a hidden little man can direct the movements of the great machines. That's the aerial lighthouse that flings a pillar of fire

into the air by night. Over there they've got the name cut in the turf in superhuman thirty-foot letters. Then, of course, there's a wireless station somewhere: I daresay they're talking to Dick's 'plane now. It's all big, clean, silent. And presently a little speck will appear in the sky, and drop down there before us, up-wind, that way, and Dick and Ann will step out. No crowd, no fuss, no dirt. Like gods."

"There is a 'plane leaving, over there," said Mildred. She drawled a little, as ever, but you could detect an undercurrent of excitement that Aubrey had communicated.

They watched for a few minutes. "You can hardly hear anything," remarked Aubrey.

From a hangar a machine had taxied out matter-of-factly into the taking-off zone. It had appeared almost magically, for it was all but stationary again before the sound of it had crossed the 'drome. A few men and women, dim figures, walked towards it. A little group stood apart, talking earnestly. As it broke up and the individuals that composed it moved towards the machine, a dot of a man appeared at a distance, running. He had come with some message: you could not guess what. He stood talking to the pilot, who was already in his seat, and at last reached up his hand for a final handshake. You could see that he stood back a little, watching. A faint shout drifted across to them. Mechanics scattered from the propellers, and a few seconds later the muffled roar of the engines reached them. Suddenly the machine was running forward, and the next moment—you could scarcely determine at what moment—it left the ground. The roar increased. It circled slightly right. In another moment they were craning their heads upward, and in another it was gone. The officials had already scattered, nonchalantly.

Aubrey drew a deep breath. "I don't care," he said defiantly. "I'm glad I'm here. It's the dawn of a new world."

Mildred did not at once reply. Then she said: "What's the time?"

Aubrey fumbled with his overcoat. "By Jove," he said, "they ought to be here." He had had to look steadily at the dial. "It's getting dark, too," he said.

An official came out of a building behind and paused a moment to sweep the sky. Then he came easily towards them.

"You waiting for the Paris 'plane?" he asked.

"Yes," said Aubrey.

"They're a bit late. There were only two passengers, and they're using a smaller machine. That's Paris all over."

"How do you know?" asked Mildred curiously.

The man smiled. "Wireless from Paris, mum. The Channel station's reported them, too. Saxon Top may call any minute. That's our warning."

"Saxon Top!" cried Aubrey. "That's close to Pickworth Hill, Mildred. They may be over Harker's Orchard now. I told you if we waited we might have seen them pass."

"Ah," said the official, unconcernedly; "they're lighting up."

A column of light had shot into the sky. Pools of illumination appeared here and there on the ground, as if the moon lay in fragments. A score of small stars shone about the edge of the aerodrome. By contrast the night thickened and the flying field was enlarged. A red star glowed in one pylon, a green in another. In the dusk, the mystery of the place deepened.

"All for Dick and Ann," said Aubrey, softly. "It's rather jolly."

The official was glancing about with a faint air of irritation. "There was fog in the Channel. It's thickening here, too. Fog's the one——"

A bell rang behind him. He broke off suddenly and walked quickly into the building from which he had come. "That'll be Saxon Top, I guess," he said. The door slammed.

The building was only three or four paces behind them. Aubrey took Mildred's arm, excitedly. "Aren't you bucked you came?" he demanded. "Let's go and listen."

A window was open, and they walked up to it. The man was sitting at a little table, a telephone receiver at his ear. His gaze was on the window, and he saw them at once. You could see from his face that he was not actually hearing anything at the moment but only waiting for a message.

He smiled when he saw them. "Saxon Top's reported 'em," he said. "Flying a bit slowly. A little engine trouble, they think."

Fear shot suddenly into Aubrey's heart. Then it almost instantly passed, but he felt unnaturally cold. Also, but you could not have told so from his voice, it had been as if, momentarily, there were no more time. Something in him had seen the end from the beginning, but his normal consciousness had reasserted itself and refused to see. He had not advanced far enough along the path of recognition.

"Is there any danger?" he asked. He had a vision, now, of Dick and Ann limping terrifically above a gulf of air.

The man shook his head slightly. "Oh, no," he said. "We've never yet had a smash. Don't you worry." He broke off sharply, his voice changing and rising as he spoke into the 'phone. "What?"

Endless seconds passed. They stared at him, but there was nothing to be read in his face. Then: "Where?" and a second later: "When?"

He put down the receiver and stood up, passed from their view as he made for the door, emerged and hesitated a second before them.

"What is it?" demanded Mildred, sharply.

"You'd best wait here," said the man. "Don't get excited. It's nothing much. They're off their course a bit, that's all, and it's foggy. Saxon Hill's lost sight of them."

Before either could reply, he had slammed the door and walked quickly away.

Mildred turned to Aubrey, white-faced in the gloom. "What do you make of it?" she asked.

Aubrey's round chubby face was grave, but his eyes peered steadily at her through his glasses. "You heard as much as I did," he said. "We can only wait. Any trouble is naturally more alarming to us. It's all so—so monstrous."

"But d'you think there's been a smash? Good God, this is awful! Ann!"

"They plainly do not know there's been a smash or he'd have told us."

"He was disinclined to talk, though. Damn this flying! Why do people want to do new things? Why can't they be content? Aubrey, I can't wait here. Let's go to the entrance."

"All right," said Aubrey. "Someone has to do the new things, Mildred."

"Not one's friends," she retorted.

They had a couple of hundred yards to go and they walked in silence after that. It had grown quite dark, and the ground was uneven so that they had to pick their way. At last, however, they came into the glare

of the arc-lamps at the entrance-buildings. On the edge of the lighted area, three or four mechanics were standing together, watching the door of an office that gave on a kind of lobby. In the lobby itself were one or two officials.

As they came up, the door opened and a man came out. He was in civilian clothes and obviously a person of importance from his manner. He left the door open and turned in the direction of the arrival area. As he came abreast of them, he paused.

"Excuse me," he said, "but are you waiting for the Paris 'plane?"

"Yes," replied Aubrey. "What's happened?"

"You have relations on board?"

"No. Friends. What's happened? Has there been a smash?"

"I'm awfully sorry to have to say so, but I'm afraid there has been some trouble. The pilot appears to have had to make a forced landing. We don't know where yet. It'd be stupid for me to tell you not to be alarmed, but I can say, honestly, that as yet there is no cause to fear the worst. There are scores of excellent landing places round Little Bailing and Hillmarston. If he cleared Pickworth Hill."

"Pickworth Hill!" cried Mildred.

"That's where I live," said Aubrey, almost wonderingly. He thought the man was watching them curiously. The mechanics had drawn nearer and were listening. He tried to keep his voice steady. It was hard, because, all the time, deep down in him, something spoke and spoke and spoke again. Only he could not hear what it said and events prevented him listening.

"Then I should advise you to go home as quickly as possible. Will you give me your address? You are on the 'phone?"

"No," said Aubrey, "I'm not." He hesitated.

Mildred understood. "I am," she said. "Penscott Hall, Waterhouses. Thirty-seven, Waterhouses. We'll go there and wait."

The man smiled gravely. "That's Colonel Sinclair's, isn't it?" he said. "I know him slightly. I'm Mr. Farman, one of the directors here."

"I'm Mrs. Sinclair," said Mildred. "You'll ring up, then?"

"As soon as we know anything. Mr. and Mrs. Thurstan were the only passengers. They were your friends?"

Aubrey broke in. "If——" he hesitated—"if there's been any serious trouble, what will you do? What's happening now?"

"There are half a dozen cars at this moment looking for them. As soon as the plane is found, one of our cars will take Mr. and Mrs. Thurstan wherever they wish to go. What address would they be likely to give?"

"Harker's Orchard. They were coming to me. I've a car here to meet them."

The director thought a moment. Then he appeared to make up his mind. "Look here," he said, "if there's been no real trouble, they will very likely be at your house as soon as you can get there yourself. You'll take the Hillmarston and Little Bailing, Latimer Hill road, I suppose. Well, between Hillmarston and Little Bailing we've a lighthouse. You've probably noticed it? (Aubrey nodded.) Well, call in there. They'll probably know all there is to be known by that time, and I'll phone them to expect you. How will that do?"

"That's all right," said Aubrey, "but—one thing. It's just as well to be prepared. If they were injured, where would they be taken?"

Mr. Farman hesitated. Then: "If seriously, to the

nearest house, I suppose," he said. "If surgical treatment were necessary, possibly at once to Croydon Hospital. In point of fact—please don't be alarmed; it's merely a usual precautionary measure—we've 'phoned them already and an ambulance is on the way out."

Aubrey suddenly could not speak. Recognition was too acute at last. Emotion choked him. He had hard work to master it. It was Mildred who seemed to know what he would wish done. Almost in her normal tones, she said: "We would rather Harker's Orchard or Penscott Hall, whichever is nearer. After all, if they are injured, either of them, Croydon is much further to go. You—we—would 'phone for——"

From the open door a man came out quickly and advanced towards them. They all three turned instinctively to meet him. He addressed himself to Mr. Farman.

"Beg your pardon, sir, but the plane's found. They appeared to have attempted a forced landing and crashed in pines this side of the top of Pickworth Hill, just off the road to Waterhouses."

"Any casualties?" asked Farman curtly.

"Yes, sir; sorry, sir." The man glanced at Mildred, hesitatingly.

"Please tell us," said Mildred quietly.

"Well, mum——" He broke off. Then he spoke again to his superior. "Pilot's dead, sir. Gentleman passenger badly injured. Lady's only shaken."

"Thank God," said Aubrey, brokenly.

III

Aubrey refused Mr. Farman's courteous offer of a chauffeur to drive his car, and took the wheel himself. Mildred got in quietly beside him and sat still, saying

nothing. They had a good hour and a half's drive at the least before them ; probably, in the night, a couple of hours.* At first the Croydon traffic compelled them to go slowly. Mildred found herself rather wondering at Aubrey, who had displayed such emotion and who yet drove past the thundering trams—seizing his opportunity, driving fast, slowing down—with such apparent fortitude. He might as well have been engaged on any ordinary return home, a little late perhaps and therefore inclined to take “chances.” But at *The Swan and Sugar Loaf* they turned off the main road, and once climbing Hill-marston hill he spoke for the first time. “Mrs. Mickle will know what to do,” he said.

It showed how his mind dwelt on the tragedy now being staged in that pleasant house of his on the hillside that they had left so securely but a few hours before. In point of fact Mildred had been dubious of Mrs. Mickle. But now she assented. “I’m glad, Aubrey,” she said.

Once up the hill Aubrey accelerated. They tore along the ridge towards Little Bailing, with occasional glimpses into the valley on their right, with its bright lights. But up here the fatal fog still hung. If Aubrey had not known the road so well he could not have driven so fast. Barns and houses rose up suddenly out of the night and the mist, but Aubrey had already commenced to turn with the road before its trend was absolutely visible. At last, ahead, on the left, a beam of light appeared, rising like a fairy chimney to the sky with the fog-wreaths swirling in and out of it. Mildred realised they were passing the aerial lighthouse she had never noticed before, and shuddered slightly and involuntarily. It was now useless to stop ; before they left Croydon they had heard that the ambulance was on its way to Harker’s Orchard ; but her thoughts raced. Had Ann seen that finger ahead

of them as she and Dick slipped through the night? Had they known that there was any danger, or had there been no warning—only a crash in the dreadful dark? Perhaps, in an aeroplane, you were told what to expect, and they had been gathering their things together knowing that five minutes more they would be over Croydon. Or perhaps they had been facing death for hours. . . . No; scarcely hours; the whole journey did not take that. But it would seem hours.

"Latimer Hill," said Aubrey, while she was still thinking. "Must go down in second." He changed faultlessly.

"How long now?" she asked, for the sake of speaking.

He shrugged his shoulders slightly. "I've never timed it. There's only Gadshunt to slow us up, anyhow, after this."

They lapsed into silence again. The hill seemed unending. The car slid round curves and bends, in and out of the tall silent trees whose trunks lit up ghostlily, now this side, now the other, as they twisted and turned. Near the bottom, where the road straightens out, she knew he took a chance. He changed into top deliberately and all but let her go. They rushed down through the dark. A white cottage was gone in a flash. Then she noticed his lips tighten a little. He sounded his horn. There was a bend, a dip under a bridge, an invisible rise beyond, for which they were travelling much too fast. For a minute she caught her breath; then relaxed. "Thought I could do it," said Aubrey, more humanly than he had spoken since they left. The incident relieved them both, for some reason, and they spoke a little.

"Aubrey, you know Ann's expecting a child."

"Yes. Dick told me. Not for a long time, yet, though."

"No, thank God. Still—— They said she was only shaken. They surely would have told us if there had been anything worse."

"I think so. That fellow, Farman, seemed a decent chap."

"Look out. Lights ahead."

"I see. Coming this way. My God, Mildred, it's the ambulance!"

"Oh, stop, Aubrey, and ask."

He slowed down, reluctantly. "It won't do any good, asking. We're only wasting time."

"But I must know how badly he's hurt."

"All right." Aubrey drew to the side of the road. He leant out, shouting and waving.

The ambulance drew abreast of them, and stopped, its big red crosses gleaming on the white paint. A man beside the driver leaned forward. "What is it, sir? A h'accident?"

"No. I'm Mr. Linscott, of Harker's Orchard. We've been waiting at Croydon. Aren't you——"

The man interrupted. "It's the gentleman, Tom," he said to his mate, and started to climb down from his perch.

Mildred cried impatiently: "Don't get down. We can't wait. But we had to know. How are they?"

The man turned, one foot on the step, ridiculously. He spoke over his shoulder. "Lady's all right. Gent's bad, though, mum. We brought Doctor Figgis from 'orspital and 'e's there with 'im. Unconscious, 'e is. We've got a message for Mr. Norton, 'ouse surgeon. I dunno——"

"Thanks. That'll do. Good-night. Drive like hell, Aubrey."

At the turning out of Gadshunt, the A.A. man appeared concernedly and shouted after them. Neither took any

notice. There was nothing on the road all the way to Pickworth Hill. Aubrey took the turn recklessly and tried to drive her up on top. He failed and had to drop to second. They crawled over the summit and glanced instinctively to the right. The ground fell away sharply here to the meadows that led to the church and the little brook where Aubrey had looked for newts. A deep mist hid all the valley. The lights of Harker's Orchard should have been visible, but there was nothing to see. "Never mind," said Aubrey, as if it mattered. "Less than five minutes now."

But they had to crawl in the dark down the little lane and it seemed years to Mildred. As people will, they spoke now of obvious things that both knew. "You have to hug the right here," said Aubrey. "The left bank will slide into the valley one of these days."

"Yes. Lucky there's not much traffic."

"One meets another car occasionally and it's devilish awkward."

He slowed up at the gate. "I'll leave the car," he said; "it might be wanted." But Mildred was already out.

IV

In the porch, with the scent of honeysuckle on the night air, he stopped a second, taking off his cap. "God," he prayed, "if it be possible . . ." Then he stepped into the lamplight.

Mrs. Mickle was at the door which led from the kitchen, big, motherly, trouble in her eyes, which from time to time she wiped with her handkerchief. He noticed that dinner had been laid for four. Mildred had disappeared. "Well?" he said sharply.

"E's in your room, sir," she said in a whisper. "'E's not spoke since they brought 'im in. 'Is poor lady's with

'im, an' the doctor. 'Edge is 'ere, sir; 'e wouldn't go 'ome. We saw the lights, sir."

In her emotion she had relapsed into her homeliest accent. "What lights?" demanded Aubrey.

"The lights of the h'aeroplane, sir. Veery lights, 'Edge said they was. Four or five there was, white, like fireworks. We thought it 'ud 'it the 'ouse, it were flying that 'ow. But it got over. Then 'Edge went orf on 'is bike; 'e thought they'd land somewheres in the National. Next thing I knew, sir," she added with more dignity, "the h'ambulance was 'ere."

"I'm glad you put him in my room," he said, coming forward. "What does this Doctor Figgis say?" He put his cap and gauntlets on the table, and shed his coat.

She came forward to take it, but before she could reply the door opened on the landing above them. Light shone out into the darkness and Mildred appeared. She looked over. "We're coming down, Aubrey," she said.

"All right," he replied; "or shall I come up?"

"No. Wait a few minutes. There's no hurry. He's unconscious."

She turned and looked into the bedroom. "Will you come, Ann?" He heard her ask.

A clear voice said: "Yes, please."

In another moment he stood face to face with Ann.

He had not remembered her to be so tall or so young or so beautiful. Still less had he expected her to be so calm. She was pale, naturally, and he noticed that her left hand was bound up, but otherwise her eyes looked into his almost with serenity. And as he looked, Aubrey realised that she, too, had had sight.

Emotion welled up in him. This was the girl of Dick's choice. This was the Ann of the letters who had led his friend out of great darkness into—into—what? Aubrey

could not formulate that yet to himself; besides, had he not been so eager to learn? But at least into peace.

"Ann," he said brokenly, "Ann."

She smiled and gave him her hand, pressing his warmly. "Thank you," she said simply, understanding what he had wanted to say. "Dick was so eager we should know each other."

"How is he?" demanded Aubrey.

Mrs. Mickle came forward with a chair. "Won't you sit down, mum?"

"No, thanks," she said. "I'll be going back in a minute." Then to Aubrey: "Mrs. Mickle has done everything for us, Aubrey, and Doctor Figgis seems very nice and capable. He has done all he can do. He's sent for the hospital surgeon and a nurse and he's been to the Manor to telephone for a specialist from London too. We just have to wait."

She said it so quietly and so bravely that the tears stood in Aubrey's eyes. Mildred was crying audibly. Ann turned to her. "Don't, Mildred, dear. It doesn't do any good. And Dick wouldn't like it."

Aubrey noticed that, and all that it implied—that she was bound up in him, that she knew what would be in his mind, that she had learnt a great deal from him and was in the habit of learning.

Then she turned back to him. "Would you like to go up alone?" she said. "I'll follow in a minute or two."

Aubrey turned and went.

The bed was on the left of the door as you entered the room. The windows were wide open to the night. The doctor was sitting on the far side and rose as he came in. "Mr. Linscott?" he said.

"Yes," said Aubrey. He saw a short clean-shaven man, stocky, young, with an air of reserved strength.

They shook hands and turned there, at the foot of the bed, to look down on Dick. "How is he?" Aubrey asked. "What's wrong?"

Dick lay flat on his back, his head raised. His eyes were shut and he breathed heavily. His face was quite composed, however, and he might have been asleep. Aubrey could judge nothing.

"I can't, exactly say," said Dr. Figgis, "yet. He was unconscious when we found him and has been unconscious ever since. They've probably told you that. The right leg is broken, and a couple of ribs. I've attended to that, of course. Otherwise he has no external injuries beyond a few scratches. But there's internal complication, spinal I think, possibly cerebral, that's dangerous. But I should expect him to recover consciousness in an hour or so."

"You think he will live?"

The doctor glanced at Aubrey for a moment. Then: "Mr. Linscott, frankly, it's impossible to say. Apart from everything else, we shall know better when he is able to speak."

"And meantime?" Aubrey asked.

"We can only wait."

There was a knock at the door. "Come in," said Aubrey. Mrs. Mickle opened it a little. "There's a man at the door, sir. From a paper. He wants to see somebody. Mrs. Thurstan, if he can."

Aubrey gave an exclamation and made for the door, but Figgis interrupted him. "One moment," he said. "Shall I go? Mrs. Thurstan ought not to be bothered."

"Of course not. I'll send him away."

Mrs. Mickle spoke from the door. "Mrs. Thurstan's talking to him, sir," she said, in a low eager voice.

"Stop her," said Figgis.

Aubrey ran downstairs.

He was hotly angry, but the scene in the hall arrested him. He had expected a vulgar, inquisitive, big man, somehow, and had been eager to rescue Ann. He saw a young fellow sitting on a chair with a notebook already in his hand, and Ann sitting calmly opposite him. Somehow his anger died away, but he crossed the hall quickly. "Ann," he expostulated. The young man looked up compassionately.

Ann smiled faintly. "I know, Aubrey," she said, "but something ought to be said, if only for the pilot's people's sake, and I'm the only one who can say it. Mr. Wills has promised that no one else shall come and that he'll circulate my statement. He came with a policeman. It won't take five minutes."

The young man had risen. "I'm sorry, Mr. Linscott," he said, "but I think this is the best way. The lady's right."

"Very well, then," said Aubrey, "but be quick."

The young man sat down again.

"Are you ready? Shall I go on, then?" asked Ann.

"If you would, madam," he said,

Aubrey stood listening, as if it were a dream. He was aware of Mrs. Mickle on the stairs behind him and of Mildred in the shadow by the study door. Only Ann's face was clear in the lamplight, and all the time she kept her eyes on the reporter. She spoke quite clearly.

"Well, then," she resumed, "the engine seemed all right again before we crossed the Channel. We were neither of us alarmed at all: we had flown before a good deal on the Continent. It was quite light on the English side and the station there signalled to us. We rocked a bit after that, but nothing alarming, and our pilot rose several hundred feet I should think. It was about a quarter of an hour later, because I looked at my watch, that we began to sink unevenly. The engine sounded

differently, too, somehow. If it had been a car, I should have said it was knocking. The pilot turned a little, however, and smiled at us, and we were reassured. But we still seemed to drop. I think my husband was a little anxious, it was so misty below. But I wasn't. You never do know exactly what's happening in an aeroplane. I shouldn't have been surprised, either, if we had been dropping towards Croydon.

"I said so to Dick. He said: 'We're not over the South Downs yet. We're flying slow.'

"I said: 'We shall be late then,' and he laughed: 'Aubrey hates to be kept waiting.' I just tell you that to show you we weren't really alarmed.

"Then a little later Dick said, in rather a queer voice: 'I think that's Chipping Wold. Ann, dear, it looks to me as if we might not clear it.'

"I was fearfully frightened then, suddenly, but he was holding my arm and I got quieter almost at once. The pilot looked quiet enough, too. And in a moment we rose a bit more, though I think the knocking increased. Then we were over the Weald and we couldn't see anything.

"Then (and Ann's voice faltered a little for the first time) it all happened suddenly. Trees and things loomed up apparently right ahead. The 'plane slipped violently and recovered. It looked as if the pilot made some sort of desperate effort and we sort of shot up a little. He looked round and shouted something which we couldn't hear, but his face had gone white. Then with one hand he caught hold of a sort of pistol and fired several times, balls of white light. Dick said to me, quite calmly: 'Ann, that's an S.O.S. signal. He's got to land. Kiss me, dear.'"

She stopped a second. Aubrey put his hand on her shoulder. "Don't, dear," he said, with difficulty, "that's enough."

Ann turned to him bravely, tears in her big eyes. "No, Aubrey, let me finish, once and for all. You must be told, too. And I want people to know about Dick."

Aubrey's hand dropped. For a second his eyes met those of the reporter, tense and tragic, too. He thought, swiftly, that the man must be used to tragedy and yet he was moved. Then he fixed his eyes on Ann's face as she went on.

"So I kissed him. He said: 'Just hold tight. Shut your eyes. It won't be many seconds.'

"Then he put his right arm about me and pulled me half across him. I didn't realise why, then. He said: 'Whatever happens, Ann, it's all right. Nothing can take from us what we've had and nothing can keep from us what is to be. Hold tight. Put your head on me. Pray any prayer you can think of dear, quietly, quite quietly. Shut your eyes.'

"I did. It was like—like—going to sleep. I think I was almost happy; he was so calm. Only then, suddenly, we crashed into something; the machine shook; there was a kind of roaring and—and—— That was all."

She ceased speaking and no one said a word. Mrs. Mickle sobbed noisily behind Aubrey; Mildred was crying quietly, too. As for Ann, Aubrey saw with a kind of wonder that tears were rolling down her face but that she still sat upright, without moving. As for the reporter, his hand had ceased moving on the block, but he had not looked up. Tense emotion held all of them.

Then Doctor Figgis called authoritatively from the landing: "Mrs. Thurstan!"

The voice galvanised them all into life. Mrs. Mickle crossed to the kitchen door, her face half-hidden in her apron. The reporter got up quickly: "Thank you so much," he began. But Ann was already half-way up the stairs. She did not look back.

Aubrey stood irresolute. If any change had come or was coming to Dick, he wanted to be there. Ann, this Ann, would not refuse him that. So much hung upon it. Dear God, but let him speak! And yet the reporter—he supposed he must stay.

Mildred came out of the shadows. The light fell on her grief-stricken face. "Ah, Mildred," cried Aubrey, and could not say more.

She seemed to guess. "I'll go up," she said. "If he comes to, I'll call you at once."

She passed him and he was free to attend to this Mr. Wills. The soul of courtesy, he said: "Won't you have a drink? It's a long ride."

"No, thanks. I ought to get away at once. What a woman, Mr. Linscott."

Aubrey was silently resentful. Then he mastered himself. "Yes," he said.

The young man flicked over a page. "About Mr. Thurstan, Mr. Linscott. Could you tell me? He must have been a most remarkable personality."

"Look here," said Aubrey, "you have had your story. Can't you——" He stopped. He was going to add "let us alone now." But he thought to himself that he had better say something, something that would, if possible, stop the truth. So he swallowed his impatience. "Mr. Wills, you can see our anxiety for Mr. Thurstan. I'm sure you won't want to detain me. (The young man shook his head.) At this hour of night, too. Mr. Thurstan was a great personal friend of mine. He has been travelling on the Continent for a year or more now, with his wife." He was very interested in Greek antiquities—they are recently come from Greece. Independent means."

The young man bowed as well as he could, seeing he was writing all the time. "Mrs. Thurstan?" he queried at last.

Mildred leaned over the banister. "Aubrey," she called softly. "Come."

He held out his hand. Mr. Wills grasped it. "Mrs. Mickle," Aubrey called, and when she appeared: "Please show Mr. Wills out." Then to him: "Good-night."

"Good-night, sir," said Mr. Wills, "and thank you very much."

Aubrey did not reply. Mr. Wills got Mrs. Mickle's story in the lane. The good woman had no idea she had told it him.

V

Dick's eyes were open as Aubrey entered. His head was turned ever so slightly towards the door and Ann was kneeling by the bed. She had entered and dropped down there, quite plainly. She had hold of one of Dick's hands and was bent over it. Mildred had passed out as he went in. Dr. Figgis had stepped back a few paces and was by the window.

"Ah, Aubrey," said Dick.

Aubrey was surprised at his voice. It was not strong, but far from being a whisper. It cheered him, instantly. But he himself instinctively lowered his own voice. "Why, Dick, old man," he said.

Ann made a motion. "No, dear," said Dick, "don't go. There's a chair, Aubrey. Sit down."

Aubrey sat down in a chair by the bed. "How do you feel?" he asked feebly, conscious that perhaps he should not ask it. Truth to tell, he did not know what to say. Dick's eyes held him. He did not believe fever could have made them so bright. His friend's whole personality looked out of them, and it seemed to Aubrey a changed personality. Yet he had said nothing to suggest a change.

"A pretty way to come home, eh, old man. Tumbling into your back-garden."

Aubrey could not restrain himself, right or wrong. "Thank God, you're alive," he said.

Dick smiled—the ghost of a smile. "Very much alive, Aubrey," he said. But even as he spoke, his voice was noticeably weaker.

Dr. Figgis came forward. "I think that's enough, Mr. Thurstan," he said. "I don't want you to talk much. It would be better now if you could sleep a little."

Ann raised her head. "Do you think you could, sweetness?"

Figgis spoke again. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Thurstan, I'll tell you exactly what I do want. I want your wife to lie down and try to sleep, too. For an hour or two, anyway. I myself am going to beg for something to eat. We'll leave Mr. Linscott here meanwhile."

"Let me stay, doctor," Ann pleaded.

"Darling," said Dick, "please do what he says. You see, you'll help me more if I know you're resting. And besides, the doctor will promise to call you if I want you especially."

"Certainly," said Figgis. "And Mrs. Thurstan can stay for a minute or two while I speak with Mr. Linscott."

Ann fixed her eyes again on Dick's face. Figgis made a slight gesture to Aubrey and they both went out on to the landing. He shut the door gently. Mildred was with Mrs. Mickle in the spare bedroom, a little way along the corridor. The door was open and there were lights. You could hear their subdued voices.

"Come downstairs a moment," said Figgis.

The two men descended to the hall and there the doctor turned and faced Aubrey. "Mr. Linscott," he said, "I've already said all there is to say. If he can sleep naturally it will do him the world of good. We have every reason for congratulation that he speaks

normally. I want his wife to rest, if she possibly can—she's had a far greater shock than she realises. And I want you to let me have something to eat—anything will do. I came away without dinner and I may need all my strength to-night and to-morrow. If you can watch for an hour or two, I'll eat and see to Mrs. Thurstan. Call me if there's the faintest change."

"Of course, doctor. I'll ask Mrs. Sinclair to tell Mrs.—my housekeeper. What do you think of him yourself, doctor?"

"There is nothing more to be done, at least, not until Mr. Norton comes. Probably then we shall await Sir James Houghton. They should both be here in two or three hours at most."

"Then I'll go back at once," said Aubrey, and left him. On the landing he called Mildred and asked her to give instructions to Mrs. Mickle.

The sick man had not moved. He was lying with closed eyes as Aubrey entered, Ann still kneeling beside him. "What a heavenly night, Aubrey," he said slowly.

Aubrey glanced towards the open windows. The fog had lifted and the radiance of a full moon bathed the landscape. From the bed you could not see the garden or even the distant Downs; only the air, luminous with soft light.

"Lovely," said Aubrey. "Can you sleep, old man?"

"The flowers smell so perfectly in the night," said Dick.

Aubrey could not smell them, but he nodded, standing hesitatingly.

Ann understood. She rose, kissed Dick without a word, and went out. Aubrey dared not look at her as she passed.

"Shut your eyes and try to sleep, Dick," he said.

Dick smiled faintly and closed his eyes.

Aubrey drew a chair near and sat down. The vigil began.

It was very still within and without the room. The injured man breathed irregularly and a little heavily, so that from time to time Aubrey glanced at him with apprehension; but otherwise there was no sound. If they were moving about in the house, it was with calculated quietness. And in the garden there seemed a calculated quietness, too. Not an owl hooted; no wind stirred the trees.

Aubrey sat still himself, his eyes on the form of Dick outlined by the bed-clothes. In a few minutes, it seemed as if Dick had never left Harker's Orchard, as if the last year had never been, as if, at some point in time, there had been a nightmare calamity and Dick had been brought to this bed, to lie there for endless hours. Aubrey fought against that feeling. He tried to keep not merely physically awake but physically ready. One could not tell what part there would be to play in the next four and twenty hours. Imagination must not be given a too free rein.

But in one particular it would not be denied. Making all allowances for his maimed state, this was not the same Dick who had left the Orchard a year ago. Aubrey pieced together fragments that indicated this and found the task easy. There was, of course, Ann's story of the disaster. He did not doubt its truth, but the Dick of a year ago would have faced death smiling nonchalantly or even eagerly inquisitive. This Dick had been so positive and so quiet. And he had bade Ann pray. Any prayer. Had he, Aubrey, been absolutely right in what he had said to Mildred, half in jest?

Then the little conversations there had been—could one build on them? If so, Dick had had a control of himself, a curious practical serenity, he had never manifested

before. A phrase from one of his books in the study below came into his mind: "Anchored in Being." Within that sure anchorage, had he sensed the night and smelt the flowers? Still more, was the soul of Dick, though in pain and uncertainty for himself and for others, conscious, anchored there, that external happenings had value only as happenings, and content? It might be so.

"Aubrey."

He started, and bent forward. "I thought you were asleep, Dick. Do you want anything? Shall I call the doctor?"

Feebly the sick man moved his head a little in a negative gesture. "Not asleep, but I've been resting," he said. "It's quite all right, Aubrey. . . . You understand?"

Aubrey was puzzled, and troubled at the words. It wouldn't do to pretend he understood if Dick wanted to say something or thought that by that enigmatical phrase he had said something. "Not quite, old man," he said.

"You see—one's self—doesn't die," said Dick, as if with difficulty.

Aubrey nodded, much moved.

Dick seemed scarcely satisfied. "I know it," he said. "Ann, too, but she'll need help."

"Dick, Dick," cried Aubrey, "don't think of that, don't worry at all! Of course, if anything should happen to you" (he hated the subterfuge, but what was he to say?) "Ann will be my care. She can have Harker's Orchard, for herself—and the child. I've—I've—wanted it, a long time."

Dick's eyes were fixed on him and for a moment he did not reply. Then: "Yes," he said, "that will be very good for you both."

Somehow Aubrey was not surprised at so strange a formula of thanks. Dick and he seemed to be together

in some deep and hidden chamber of reality with which the world about them, and its manners and customs, had nothing to do. Thus he had never formulated to himself that Ann should have Harker's Orchard—so monstrous a gift, almost all he had—and yet, now, he knew he had not lied to his friend: in some strange way, he had—always, it seemed—meant it to be so. Or perhaps it *was* meant to be so. And he had just recognised the fact.

And then, in that secret place, something else that did not seem incongruous either presented itself. "Dick," he said, "would you like a priest—the last sacraments?"

Dick smiled.

"Thou canst not have forgotten all
That it feels like to be small"

he whispered. "I've been thinking that, Aubrey. You remember; you read it me. So true. 'Baby-talk.' Yes, Aubrey, if he'll come."

Aubrey got up. "I'll go at once," he said.

Dick's eyes followed him. "But he'll have to know," he said.

CHAPTER XII

Light of Lights

I

It was only when he was once more in the car and speeding through the night that Aubrey began to turn over in his mind those last words. The necessity for action, once Dick had said that "Yes" at his suggestion, had, as it were, lifted him out of that quiet retreat in which he had talked to Dick, in which things had seemed so

simple; and action, once set on foot, had prevented his thinking. He had had to call Dr. Figgis and explain. Ann had been sleeping—Figgis had seen to that—and Mildred, without question, had agreed to make the necessary arrangements while the doctor watched his patient. Then in the dark Aubrey had had to fill the petrol tank, trying to think how far he would have to go to find a Catholic priest. Broad Chalke was the nearest possibility, he thought, but he wasn't sure if there was a priest resident there. A convent, he had heard; they would tell him, anyway. So he had started.

But, reeling the familiar miles off automatically, he began to turn his errand over in his mind. "He'll have to know." What? That Dick had been a priest, that he had been excommunicated, that he had lived with Ann—all that? Then would a priest come at all? Aubrey was not sure.

He tried to apply the canons of Anglo-Catholicism. Surely no priest could refuse to go, if summoned, to the bedside of a possibly dying man. That seemed certain. But what would he want when he got there? A confession? But if the sick man could not make it? A sign of penitence, then. And was Dick penitent?

Aubrey knew he was not, in a sense. But in another sense, if he were not penitent, why had Dick said that he would *like* a priest? He racked his brain. In what sense had Dick returned to faith, for plainly in some sense he had returned? When he had left England he had been very definitely agnostic. He had declined even to discuss the very existence of God, as something beyond all reason. He had certainly ceased to pray. Yet, now, there were several little things which showed a change or a new attitude. He had told Ann to pray at the moment of the disaster. He had seemed confident of the survival of the soul, he, who had doubted its very

existence. And he had asked for a priest. Could he say, then, that his friend had returned to the Faith? He knew he could not.

Thus he argued, until suddenly he remembered Dick's curious quotation. Considering the circumstances, it was almost as if Dick had been meditating on the poem while he had been lying there so still. "Baby-talk." But if the Dick of incisive logic held the sacraments to be baby-talk, would he be asking for them? It was a difficult dilemma in which he would find himself when he came face to face with the priest, when the priest "had to know," and when he, Aubrey, had to tell him.

And then Aubrey suddenly arrested himself. He himself was forgetting. He would get nowhere if he argued to himself like this. That wasn't the way. It wasn't intelligence that one needed to understand Dick just now; it was something different altogether. He had been realising that lately; hence his talk with Mildred. He perceived that he must try to get back to that quiet chamber in which he and Dick had talked together. Automatically he controlled the car. Exteriorly the little man remained alert at the wheel. But interiorly he quieted his inner self, looked within and waited.

He was aware, first, of the extent to which he himself had ceased to be an Anglo-Catholic. It was not that he had given up his old faith, or wanted a new one. Indeed, a new one would not benefit him much. Its very strangeness would be a hindrance to his spirit. But even as he realised so much he knew that that was a weakness of his spirit. It ought to be capable of greater power of faith, for faith was not believing things to be true, but accepting things as they were in order to draw the best out of them. It was a quality of childhood. What child ever wanted to enquire into the credentials of

Father Christmas? He merely wanted to have faith in him, and enjoy him. As one could. As even Aubrey, at forty, knew that he did.

What had happened to him, then, was not a change of belief but a new formation of being. He was oriented differently. And Supreme Being would understand that. But he smiled as he thought it. As if Supreme Being could be said to *understand* anything! As if Supreme Being had need of such a poor thing as a mind! As if he could even begin to apply his own mind to Supreme Being! You just recognised Him, that was all.

That, then, was what Dick was doing. How plain it all was! Dear Dick! And "being small," he clung to "baby-talk," especially now. It was better than none; indeed it was better than any. For matters in which any talk at all was insufficient, the simplest, oldest, most familiar syllables provided the best field for faith. And Dick, now, had great faith. The beautiful night, the smell of flowers, the approach of Death, the existence of pain, the salvation of Ann, the perfecting of himself—he had faith in them all. Thus had he lit the Divine light within him, that shone out of his eyes, that radiated from his personality, that Ann naturally felt most, living with him, that even Mr. Wills had felt vaguely from listening to a story, that he himself had obtained from mere letters. Aubrey was sure, coming out of his meditation, that the priest would feel it too. On the strength of it, he drove on more cheerfully.

It was only on the outskirts of Broad Chalke that he realised how early it still was—not more than ten at latest. The Convent, a big modern house in its own grounds, not built originally for religious purposes, still showed lighted windows and thus banished one of his first fears. A lay-sister opened the door.

"I beg your pardon," said Aubrey, "but I want to

find the nearest Catholic priest. Can you tell me if there is one in Broad Chalke? I only knew of this convent."

"Why, yes," she said "We have a church here, sir. Don't turn off to the station, but go straight on. Then the first to the left. It's on the left, too. Half-way to Gadshunt. You can't miss it."

Aubrey thanked her and departed, wondering that one could live so close to other people and yet know nothing of their lives. Still, of course, the church was not on any main road. He had never been to the left here, he thought, as he swung into the turning. And in ten minutes the new (uncompleted) Gothic bulk of Our Lady and the English Martyrs rose on his left against the night sky.

It stood back from the road, in a waste of land not yet laid out. Aubrey had to leave his car and stumble round it before he found that there was no presbytery adjoining. However, away to the right, stood a house which looked ecclesiastical even in the moonlight, and he made for it. There must have been a path between the church and house, but he missed it somehow and climbed a fence instead. To go back and approach from the road would have taken too long. He found himself in the midst of a flower-bed and uttered an exclamation. But in a couple of leaps he was out of it and on gravel, and thence it was plain sailing to the fanlight over the door.

An elderly woman opened it. "Does the priest live here, and is he in?" asked Aubrey.

"Sure, glory be to God," said she, smiling. "And himself will tell ye."

She stood back hospitably and he entered. He was in a small hall, with an oleograph of Pious IX over the door on his right. The priest's servant went to that door and knocked. "Come in," said an English voice.

"Sure, Father, and sorry I am to disturb ye, but there's a gentleman wanting the priest."

"Oh." There was a sound of movement. "I'll be out in a moment."

She turned to Aubrey, still smiling. "His reverence will be with ye in a minute," she said, and left him by a door at the end of the hall that doubtless led to the kitchen.

Aubrey waited briefly and tried to think how he should begin. Then the half-opened door opened entirely and a tall spare man in a cassock came out.

"How do you do," he said politely. "You were asking for the priest. I am he."

He had an air of efficiency and authority. Aubrey felt small all at once, and foreign. He felt as if he had entered another atmosphere, but he shook the feeling off.

"I'm sorry to trouble you at this hour," he said.

The priest made a gesture, but said nothing. He was eyeing Aubrey curiously.

"It's quite simple," said Aubrey. "The fact is there's been an aeroplane crash this evening and a friend of mine is very seriously injured. He may be dying. He said he would like to see a priest."

"The Paris-Croydon smash? My housekeeper heard the news in the village."

"Yes," said Aubrey.

"I'll come at once." He half turned; then stopped.

"He's a Catholic, of course?"

Aubrey hesitated. He felt the priest watching him.

"He was," he said finally.

"Come in," said the other, and led the way, closing the door after him. "Can you tell me a few details, quickly? Is he a lapsed Catholic—I mean has he just dropped out of his religious duties?"

"He'll have to know," said Dick's voice in Aubrey's heart, conjuring up a vision again of the darkened room, the bright alert eyes, the steady voice of his friend.

The remembrance strengthened the little man. "Father," he began, and stopped, not quite sure where to begin.

"You're not a Catholic yourself?" asked the other incisively.

"No," said Aubrey, unhesitatingly. It was no time for quibbles. "As a matter of fact, my friend was a priest. He left the Church of his own accord, three years or so ago, for reasons of conscience."

"Is he married?"

Again Aubrey hesitated, and again he knew that his hesitation was noticed. Again, also, he knew there was no time to quibble. Yet he did, surprising himself. "Not by Church or State," he said.

The priest betrayed neither surprise nor bewilderment at the statement. "Has he been censured, excommunicated?" he demanded merely.

"Yes," said Aubrey.

And then to his astonishment, the other's manner changed, or he thought it did. Anyway, his answer was totally unexpected. "I'll come at once," he said. "Please sit down while I go to the church. I shan't be five minutes."

"I've a car at the gate. May I go to that?"

"Certainly." He opened the door. "Is it far?"

"Pickworth Hill. I can make it in half an hour."

Once in his car, and waiting, Aubrey was a prey to a thousand misgivings. Had he said too much? Had he said enough? A minute ago he had thought the former and had half expected a refusal. It had all been so simple. His worry on the way seemed to have been unnecessary. And yet what was the priest expecting? He must try, somehow, to tell him more about Dick. Or else——

A black figure loomed up beside him, carrying a bag. Aubrey leant over and opened the door to the seat

beside him. The other got in without a word, and without a word they started.

Once in the main road Aubrey gathered his wits together. "Father," he said. "Do you mind if I speak about Dick—my friend."

"I should be glad if you would tell me anything that might help."

"Well, it's not easy, but you might get a wrong impression from what I have told you."

"I don't think so, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Linscott," said Aubrey.

"Mr. Linscott. Your friend was a priest; he lost faith and left the Church; he is now faced with death and he has expressed a desire for a priest. I pray God that I may be in time to save his soul."

Aubrey was nonplussed. No doubt it could be put in that way. But——

"One thing I should like to know, if you can tell me," went on the other. "You implied that there was a woman in the case. Has he been living with her till now?"

"Yes," said Aubrey.

"Is she in the house?"

"Yes."

"Ah. What is her attitude?"

Aubrey stammered. "I—I—I don't think she knows you're coming. She was in the accident and was much shaken. When I left, the doctor had given her something to make her sleep."

"I see. And your friend. Is he conscious?"

"He was."

"Do you think he was conscious enough to know what his submission would imply?"

Aubrey hesitated again. What could he say? What, after all, had Dick wanted?

The other, as quickly as before, noticed his hesitation. "Never mind, Mr. Linscott," he said. "One thing only: has his living with this woman been a public thing? Do people know about it? And know that he is a priest?"

Aubrey sought a loophole and found none. "He has lived publicly with her, yes? He has made no attempt whatever to hide it. Generally it has been supposed that they are married. But some at least of us know the whole truth."

"God give him grace," said the priest, simply, and was silent, at prayer.

Not until they were climbing Pickworth Hill did either speak again. Then Aubrey said: "We shall be there in a few minutes, father. May I ask one question: why did you ask about publicity? And perhaps I should have said that I don't know if details of that sort are known in Africa. My friend was a mission-priest in Natal."

"Ah, I'm glad you've told me that. The tender mercy of the Church, Mr. Linscott, is infinite—or nearly so—in the presence of imminent death. I can dispense with faculties and accept his least sign of contrition and faith, if he is *in extremis*. I shall try to obtain—I must try to obtain—a renunciation of the woman, at least in your presence, if he is conscious enough to make it, and a general submission to the Church. Your presence is necessary in case he recovers, to avoid scandal if he should go back on his word. But if he is totally unconscious, though living, I can even accept the fact that he sent for me as probable evidence of intention, and give him absolution."

"And should he recover and not prove to have been of that mind? Or change his mind?"

"Mr. Linscott, the Sacraments, by the mercy of

God, produce their effects according to the *actual* dispositions of the patient, not according to the dispositions which he may possibly have after even a day has elapsed. Nor would the new bad disposition invalidate the acts of the previous good disposition. Such is the long suffering and justice of Almighty God."

Aubrey was silent. Amid the turmoil of his mind, one thing only was clear: that the Dick who had sent him, and this priest who came with him, were poles asunder in precisely that sort of scholasticism. He doubted that they could converse even in "baby-talk," and a cold terror gripped him. Momentarily he had a mind to turn instantly back. Suppose there was a "scene"? It was unthinkable. And then he suddenly realised again the futility of reason. He dropped back, as it were, into the atmosphere of that bed-chamber. After all, it was not his business. But he was sick at heart for Dick.

II

There was a Rolls-Royce at the door, and he realised that the specialist must have come. He said as much and intimated that they might have to wait. The priest nodded, quietly. "If I have to," he said, "may I go to a room alone?"

"Of course," said Aubrey.

Mildred had heard the car and greeted him, with a curious glance at the priest. Yes, the specialist had come, and with him, Mr. Norton and a nurse from the hospital. They were now with the sick man; Ann still slept.

No, his condition had not changed. Dr. Figgis had said that there would have to be a consultation after the examination and that then, if he were not too weak, the priest might go to Dick.

They had not long to wait. The three doctors came

down together, Dr. Figgis leading. Seeing Aubrey, he asked at once: "Has the priest come?"

Aubrey nodded. "He's in the drawing-room," he said.

"Then, Mr. Linscott, you had better take him up at once. Mr. Thurstan is quite conscious, but let him be excited as little as possible. And don't, at the most, be longer than half an hour."

Aubrey promised, vaguely, and went at once to the drawing-room. Once again his mind was a tumult of emotions. In the priest's presence he repeated the doctor's words automatically. The priest merely nodded. They went up together.

Aubrey knocked. Almost instantly the nurse opened the door. "The priest," said Aubrey: "can we come in? Doctor Figgis said——"

"One minute," she replied, and left them.

There was the scratch of a match. A little later Dick said: "Thank you, nurse," and she reappeared.

They went in. Aubrey noticed, without curiosity, that the nurse genuflected as they passed. She must, too, be a Catholic, he thought momentarily.

Mildred had set a table at the foot of the bed, against the wall. Aubrey's crucifix hung above it and two candles were lit there. It was spread with a white cloth, and a small ewer of water and a basin stood on a chair by its side, with a folded napkin. Even at that moment, Aubrey wondered that Mildred should have done as much. He looked at Dick, but the injured man's gaze went past him and rested on the priest.

The priest entered without a word and Dick did not speak either. His eyes followed the priest. Suddenly Aubrey, standing by the closed door, realised why. He watched intently. The priest was bearing the Sacrament and he went straight across to the temporary

altar, placed his bag on the ground, opened it, took out fair linen cloths, opened and disposed them, and then placed the pyx in position, covering it. Then he genuflected and turned to Dick.

And then Dick spoke. At the first sound of his voice all the tumult died in Aubrey's mind. Instead he was suddenly and instantly at peace. He was even glad to be there. It was as if he knew, instinctively, that it was all right; that Dick was master of the situation; and more than that. There seemed to radiate, from that figure on the bed, an atmosphere of quiet. The room, the little altar, the priest himself, took on a new complexion. Their significance altered. They did not seem to matter very much. Dick was no longer an injured helpless man, about to be affected by them; it was rather that they and the priest waited for Dick to use them, if he would.

But it was an odd thing that Dick said. Aubrey found himself listening as a pupil to a master. Only, as the moments passed, he wondered that the priest was so strangely dense.

"It was right of you to come, -Father," said Dick, "but I ought not to have sent for you. I realised that too late. I have exposed you to needless regret. I am very sorry."

Aubrey saw that Dick had changed in the last couple of hours and he knew that in a way he should have been sorry. But he was not. Layman as he was, he could see that his friend was less well in body than he had been. His voice was too clear, his mind too direct. He seemed already to have loosened hold on mutable things and to have acquired something other-worldly. He seemed more spirit and less flesh. And Aubrey was awed by that spirit.

The priest, obviously, had expected anything but this. He was momentarily at a loss. But he pulled himself together. "My brother," he said, "you knew well that

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I should come. You have not forgotten the infinite tender-mercies of Almighty God."

"But you would not do your duty if you administered the Sacraments to me."

"Are you sure? Wasn't it the motion of faith—of returning faith—in your heart that made you send for me? Will you not, now, allow your will to rest tranquilly on God? Nothing else matters. You know that you should profess, here and now, in the presence of your friend, your submission to our Holy Mother the Church, and prepare yourself for Absolution. Try to feel that you are face to face with your Maker; will you not renounce all for Him?"

"In renouncing all I should renounce Him, Who is all," said Dick, simply.

The priest looked puzzled. "That is not what I meant," he said. "I think you must have known that." Dick ignored that. "I was very weak," he said, speaking slowly and very distinctly. "I knew that it would have been good if I could have repeated the old prayers and let my faith rest on Christ. But I see more clearly now. I cannot do that at your expense, for the law of your Church would forbid you to give me the Sacraments and you would be deceived by my attitude. However, I was not able to recall my friend who had already gone. I must now set the vision of Our Lord before me in the silence of my own soul."

"But surely you know that Our Lord must confront you, unless you are truly contrite, in wrath. And if you are contrite——"

"He does not," said that quiet voice.

It seemed to Aubrey that the priest had hard work to repress irritation. But he succeeded. "You are still setting your mind against that of Holy Church, my brother," he said.

"My mind," said Dick, "would not bring me to His Face."

Once again the priest was plainly puzzled, but he did not allow his bewilderment to check him. "It is the action of your will for which God asks, my son."

"Father, we are beating about the bush. You would have to ask me to give up Ann. Faith in the Sacraments I would very gladly profess; but I cannot, even for a moment or for that, sunder myself from her."

"Then you are putting this woman before your God."

That stung Aubrey to the quick. He had to speak. "If you knew——" he began.

Dick interrupted him. "Please, Aubrey. . . . You do not understand, Father. That is why I have apologised to you. Ann and I are bound up together."

The priest was visibly moved. "My dear brother," he said, "I think I know how you feel. At this moment I will not even comment upon or question your human love. But isn't human affection a temporal thing? You should, now, try to realise only the eternal. We are born alone and we die alone, all of us. Your own soul and God are the only considerations that should be in your mind. Can you not leave her to Him? For it may be that you must leave her in any case. And—and—hasn't *He* loved you with an everlasting love?"

"Why, yes," said Dick, "and there is Love in the world and it has been shown me in Ann."

"Say, rather in the Incarnation of Christ our Lord." He made a quick movement and held out a crucifix. "Who died for your salvation and for the sins of the whole world."

The triumphant note in the priest's voice rang through the little room—and died away. Dick lay very still, his eyes on the crucifix. There was a brief silence. Then, unexpectedly, quietly and reverently in the familiar

Latin—"baby-talk" to him—he began to speak from memory :

*"Adoro Te devote, latens Deitas,
Quae sub his figuris vere latitas ;
Tibi se cor meum totum subicit,
Quia Te contemplans totum deficit.*

*"Jesu, quem velatum nunc aspicio,
Oro fiat illud quod tam sitio ;
Ut Te revelata cernens facie
Visu sim beatus Tuae gloriae."*

He paused a minute. Then he smiled. "Amen," he said. "And now, Father, Aubrey will take you home. You will have mass to say to-morrow. I shall remember you at the altar. And thank you very much."

The startled priest could only stammer. "But—but ——" he began.

"You have done more than you know," interrupted Dick gently. "I am very grateful. It would be wronging you to ask for more. Good-bye, Father."

"But—but—you have faith, my son. In the Name of our Saviour, I implore you ; do not turn back now. I cannot leave you so. In the spirit of the words you have just used, say : 'In this, perhaps my last hour, I submit myself to God and to His Holy Church in all things,' and then, then——"

"And then," said Dick, "you would want me to make—for I have the strength—a confession of sin that was no sin, and I cannot do it. Father, you have done all you can do, and more, perhaps, than I should have asked you to do. Thank you very much. Aubrey, will you call Dr. Figgis ?"

Aubrey turned to the door, but the priest's voice arrested him. "You are rejecting the grace of God !"

he cried. "You cannot, cannot——" he stopped, choked for utterance. Then: "Don't let this be the terrible end!"

Dick spoke again. "Father," he said, "there is no beginning and there is no end, and the Light of Lights is beyond darkness. Please, Aubrey."

Aubrey understood and went out. The nurse was sitting further along the corridor, and she came forward, but he scarcely noticed her. He stumbled down the stairs. Mildred rose to receive him in the hall. "What is it?" she asked, seeing his face.

"The priest is coming down," he heard himself say. "Where are they?"

"In the study."

Aubrey crossed to the door, and knocked. A voice said: "Come in," and he opened it.

The three men sat round a table. He stood irresolute in the doorway for a moment and then said: "The priest is leaving him. He sent me to tell you."

A tall kindly-looking man on his right, rose, glancing enquiringly at Dr. Figgis. Figgis got up also. "Just a moment, Mr. Linscott," he said. "Come in. This is Sir James Houghton. Sir James—Mr. Linscott." Aubrey found himself shaking hands. "And this is Mr. Norton. Mr. Norton—Mr. Linscott." The surgeon was elderly and wore a beard. He sat down again immediately.

"Please sit down," went on Figgis. Aubrey took the chair the specialist himself offered. "Briefly," he said, "I can tell you now what I suspected, from the moment I was able to get Mr. Thurstan into bed and examine him, that an operation would be immediately necessary. When I telephoned to Sir James Houghton (who was in, by the greatest good fortune, and free), I told him my diagnosis and suggested I should send a note by the

ambulance to Mr. Norton, asking for certain necessities and a nurse. Sir James agreed, since he had to pass the hospital, to stop for them. He himself will tell you the rest."

"I should like to say, Mr. Linscott," said Sir James kindly, "that I think Doctor Figgis acted very wisely. I have examined Mr. Thurstan, and entirely—or almost entirely—confirm his diagnosis. We are agreed that we should operate at once. The trouble is——"

Aubrey could not grasp the technicalities that followed. Besides, they seemed to him superfluous. He wanted to look up at the speaker and say: "The Light of Lights is beyond darkness," stupid as he was aware that that would be. He wanted to know if the priest had left the sick-room. And he wanted to ask about Ann——

Houghton's voice ceased. Then it said, steadily, "You see, Mr. Linscott."

"Yes," said Aubrey. And then: "Ann——"

He was aware that the three glanced at each other, and hesitated. Then the specialist spoke again. "Mr. Linscott," he said, "under the circumstances, I take the responsibility upon myself. I do not think she should be awakened. It is inconceivable that she should not consent to the operation, and, frankly, it is not likely in itself to prove fatal. I mean she would have opportunity to talk to him afterwards, in almost any event."

"I see," said Aubrey, mechanically.

Figgis rose. "Then——" he said. There was a general movement.

Aubrey suddenly knew what he wanted. "May I tell him?" he asked.

Again the three silently consulted, and the specialist replied. "I think we can trust you, Mr. Linscott," he said significantly.

"Thank you," said Aubrey.

So again he found himself in the room upstairs. The lights were out and the nurse was removing the temporary altar. She seemed to understand that he was sent, and went out, bearing the candlesticks and the crucifix, and leaving them alone. Aubrey moved to the bedside and put his hand on Dick's.

"Dick, old fellow."

Dick opened his eyes and smiled. "Yes, Aubrey."

"Dick, they've agreed that they should operate, and they think it best not to wake Ann until it is over. She is sleeping and needs rest."

"Of course. Besides, we spoke together when you were away with Figgis. It is quite all right, Aubrey. God bless you, old chap."

"I'm sorry about the priest, Dick."

"Why? I'm glad he came. Aubrey, you understand about death—the little we know, I mean? It's like the flowers, Aubrey, or the night. Part of experience, I mean. That's all."

Aubrey could say nothing.

"I think Ann knows, but help her, Aubrey. You've been a good friend." He stopped abruptly.

For the first time, Aubrey, his eyes fixed on his face, noticed a spasm of pain. It came and went, but it left the sufferer speechless for awhile. Aubrey knew, then, that every minute counted.

He made a great effort. "Well," he said, "keep up your heart, old man. You've got to pull through this for all our sakes. Don't give in, Dick, for God's sake. And I'll see you afterwards."

Dick's eyes held a curious look of affection. "Surely," he said. "Au revoir, Aubrey."

Aubrey turned as Dr. Figgis knocked and entered. "Well," the doctor said cheerily, "have you told him the worst? We'll soon have you better, Mr. Thurstan."

Aubrey moved to the door and looked back once more. Dick's eyes had followed him. But in that moment the pain asserted itself again. Dick caught his breath, but mastered himself and spoke immediately. "Tell—Ann," he said with difficulty, "that—I have her—in my heart."

III

It was incredible to Aubrey of what Ann could be thinking. For a couple of hours, scarcely moving, she had sat in the window-seat of the spare bedroom about which the already thinning reddened tendrils of Virginia creeper flamed nobly in the sun. Below her lay the garden, and especially the flagged walk, between herbaceous borders, that led from the French windows of the dining-room.

She had hardly spoken throughout those terrible hours. Once, after one of those frequent openings of the sick-room door down the corridor and its almost instant hope-destroying closure, he had made a motion to shut the door—such sounds added to the suspense. "Figgis will come at once when it is any good," he had said apologetically. But she had shaken her head. "Please don't, Aubrey. I couldn't bear it closed."

Once, too, she had asked about the priest. Aubrey had told her all he could remember, partly because he himself wanted never to forget the least word of that interview and partly because he did not feel, before her sorrow, that he could attempt a paraphrase. She had commented:

"I think I understand it all. It was like Dick."

"I thought I did when I was there," he had said.

"I'm not so sure, now."

"I know. Dick always makes me feel that he *must* be right when I'm with him. Besides, this is only difficult

in the matter of his wanting a priest at all, and to understand that one has to know him very well. He doesn't believe in a personal God, intellectually, at all, you see."

"But, surely——"

"No. He would say that intellectually we had no ground at all to go upon. For any sort of description of what you might call a personal Creator and Father, that is. But he believes in what he calls 'Being'—an underlying Reality—and he believes one can get down to that through one's own being. For the rest, I think he wanted the Sacraments as one wants flowers. Something like that, anyway. Only he would offend no one to get them. Nor give me up."

She was silent, then, and Aubrey had no comment. Moreover it was more or less what he had thought. Only—in the morning—in the bright tangible sunshine—

And then she added, after quite a long interval: "We were at Benediction in the Cathedral at Cologne a week ago to-day."

So then she had been going over the past, as he had been, only, now, he was trying to banish it for good and all. The nightmare of it. The thing to do was to think of the future—and Aubrey was already scheming. It seemed heartless, but he was. It was the only occupation that held him sane, though it was based on the assumption that Ann took over Harker's Orchard, with all that that implied.

Yet he was scarcely to be blamed. He had had a terrific night. First he had had to take the priest back, to whom he had had to be almost rude before he could get him out of the house. He was sorry for that, but there it was. The good man had made up his mind that Dick could be got to "penitence" with a little more persuasion—or else he thought it his duty to stay, Aubrey wasn't sure which. In the car there had been one

regrettable incident. Aubrey had suddenly burst out with: "I wonder you went as far as you did."

"Do you? People rarely understand the mercy of the Church. Frassinetti—his book is a kind of practical Manual, Mr. Linscott—is amazing in his charity."

"Then why could you not at least have given him Holy Communion and left him to God?" burst out Aubrey.

"*Nolite sanctum dare canibus*," the priest had quoted solemnly.

His solemnity saved him from worse, but not from Aubrey's savage: "Is that application from Frassinetti also?"

And the other had not replied.

Aubrey was a little sorry afterwards for that. Dick would not have wished it. But then he had been so tired. And when he got back there had been that interval, only just less terrible than this, in which they had awaited the result of the operation.

It had been favourable. Houghton had come down smiling. The injured man was still unconscious, but that was to be expected. So far as the operation went, they had been quite successful. There was now every ground for hope.

So he had gone, and Aubrey had driven Mildred over to Penscott Hall almost as if their original programme was being carried out. Tom was away in Scotland, so that there had been no delay there. They had talked cheerily in the car. Mildred had said: "I envy you your friend, Aubrey." And Aubrey: "We shall be all friends together, Mildred."

She had said she would be over early in the morning, and she had come. She was downstairs, somewhere, now. She had gone to wire Dick's people, in the North. It had seemed inevitable, despite their breach with him.

For Aubrey had returned to find him still unconscious. Figgis was grave, but uncommunicative. Aubrey was so physically worn out that he had had to submit to eating and drinking, and the process, unbelievably, had made him sleepy. They had promised to wake him if there was any necessity, and Figgis had been quite cheerful, the last thing.

"Get a good night, Mr. Linscott, and I daresay to-morrow morning you'll see him wide awake and smiling."

He had slept till nine—dead sleep. How curious that one should sleep without dreams when one had every reason for them! Aubrey meditated awhile on dreams. If one's sub-conscious was wider awake—freer—in sleep than out of it, how was it it rarely gave one warning of—of the death of friends? Of course, there were instances, but it seemed to him more curious that there were so few authentic cases rather than that such cases did occur. Anyway, they had awakened him at nine. And told him the truth that clashed so hideously, as it seemed, with the smiling morning.

Dick's natural anæsthesia had passed, during the night, into an unnatural and alarming insensibility. Ann was up and had been with him a couple of hours. At Dr. Figgis' suggestion she had even tried to speak to him. But he had been beyond her call. In what far state or place Aubrey dared not think. And at last, when oxygen had become necessary, it would plainly only have distressed her to stay.

Figgis had provided for it in the early hours. The house had been stirring while Aubrey slept. He learned that Hedge had slept there against any emergency and had gone on his bicycle to telephone to the hospital. And the ambulance had been again, with the cylinders and an assistant.

Aubrey had seen his friend for a moment. He could

not make up his mind whether he was glad or sorry. He was glad, chiefly, because he could share that experience with Ann, help her to bear it, perhaps. But he was sorry, because it had brought him into the region of so dark a mystery that his spirit failed before it. Was it Dick who laboured for breath, unconscious, on the bed? Or if but his body, where was his Self? Did it know what was happening to its earthly tenement? Was it still as unconcerned as it had seemed to be when it looked through Dick's eyes and spoke with his voice? Perhaps more so. Aubrey sought comfort there.

It was the heart that was failing. They were injecting saline solution into his blood now. Dr. Figgis had told him, but Ann was not to know. That knowledge itself clouded Aubrey's spirit. He did not really know why it should be done, nor how. It was as if his friend were surrendered to some operation of still more terrible import. Or perhaps of final import. Ann was not likely to know either if she were told, but she might guess, he supposed.

So they had gone together into the spare bedroom and left the door open. Mildred had appeared with tea, and Ann had thanked her and drunk a cup. It was incredible how she bore it. It was incredible of what she was thinking, staring out there into the sunshine.

And of all that Aubrey tried not to think any more. It was a nightmare upon which it was useless to dwell. He made a great effort. When Dick was convalescent, he would give up the house to him and Ann. Their child should be born there. He would like that—they might even give him "Harker" for a second name! That would be rather fun, and add to the mystery of Harker. A regular saga it might make if the child inherited dear old Dick's mind and Ann's wonderful strength and depth. As he would do, inevitably. And

Aubrey would be a kind of uncle. He had never before wanted to be an uncle, though he was one, but in this case— It would be rather fun.

Ann must have heard Dr. Figgis enter, for she was on her feet, her hands clasped in front of her, her eyes— But Aubrey turned away his head.

Figgis crossed the room.

"We can do no more for him," he said gravely and simply. "I am so sorry."

IV

Ann stood quite still.

She saw the face of the young doctor, but behind it she saw a hundred mental pictures as if they were one and unconfused. There was Dick in the woods behind this very house, a smiling flabbergasted Dick who could not conceive how she knew his name. There was Dick laughing up at her out of the small yeasty sunlit waves by the edge of the rough stone jetty at Porto. There was Dick's earnest face in the great mosque, explaining that these porphyry pillars had been brought by the Emperor Justinian from Phrygia—the strange barbaric words had stuck in her mind—and that the original altar had been solid gold and jewels. There was Dick, laden with his camera, wandering among the ruins of Epidauros. There was the Dick she had seen for the first time in an hotel bedroom at Athens. There was the Dick, most of all, so very white, but so supremely calm, who had kissed her as she rested upon him in the rocking aeroplane ere she closed her eyes as he bade.

And he was dead.

It did not seem to her the least difficult to believe. She had known for hours on hours that he was dying. It had not been Dick by whom she had sat that morning.

No, he was dead; but—but—why had it been? And why had he left her alone? Utterly alone.

"I'm sure—you—you—did all you could," she said brokenly, and turned to the window.

It was so bright and glad down there. There was a thrush hopping on the grass and a big black and white cat crouched by the michaelmas daisies, his tail sweeping the path. They were both so intensely alive. And the grass was so alive, each blade of it, with little points of water sparkling in the sun. "I'm—I'm glad—he died—on a morning like this," she said, but still without tears.

And then, suddenly, she remembered that he had not seen this sun or those flowers. The cruelty of it cut her to the heart. He had lost so much. He had loved beauty so. He had just been beginning to live. He had been so conscious of power, of the future. And he'd had little more than a year of that happiness she had been able to give him. It had seemed as if the good things of life had been withheld from him for so long. They had been all in his grasp yesterday. And now—

And Ann burst into passionate tears.

It was Aubrey who recalled her to herself. He was crying, too, quite unconstrained, the little man that Dick had talked so much about, half-laughingly. "Ann, dear Ann," he said, "don't cry. Remember what he said, Ann dear. He wasn't a bit afraid. And he told me to tell you that you were in his heart."

She made a great effort and stood up. The mere action braced her. Aubrey was quite right. "He wasn't a bit afraid." She wouldn't be. If—if—if only he hadn't lost so much.

"May I go in?" she asked Aubrey.

"If you would like to," replied Dr. Figgis for him.

She walked alone to the door and down the passage.

She opened the other bedroom door and found a screen between her and the bed. The kindly nurse came forward and took her hand, without speaking.

"Thank you for all you've done, nurse," she said, not really knowing what words she used. It was a part she had to play. "May I come in?"

Ann saw tears start to the other's eyes and rather wondered why. Death must be her common experience. But she had no time to think about it. The door closed behind her.

She walked round the screen and stopped by the bed. Then she fell on her knees, clasping her hands.

V

Ann did not know what she expected to see, and she stared into the dead face almost inquiringly. As she gazed, the incredible recognition dawned on her so overwhelmingly that an active positive thrill ran through her flesh and new tears sprang to her eyes. But so different tears. *He* wasn't there. It was absurd to suppose it for a moment. He had gone on ahead, that was all.

She got up slowly and looked wonderingly round the room, searching it. Why, it was *alive* with him!

"Dick! Dick! Dear Dick!" she whispered, her amazed eyes wide. And she smiled her gladness through her tears.

THE END

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